

# How To Be Happy

First Edition

By Steven Gordon

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A special thanks to Steven Gordon for all his ideas and support.

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## Introduction

Welcome! **This book provides tips on how to increase your happiness, and just as importantly, deal with unhappy mental processes, such as boredom, irritation, indecisiveness, and sleeplessness and moderate amounts of fear, anger, and stress.** It is amazing that in this day and age, when most of America enjoys a solid measure of material prosperity, that so many people are so unhappy so much of the time. People with cars and houses and entertainment centers and loving family members worry about inconsequential things. Their emotional wealth does not match their material wealth. Hopefully they will all read this book and then lead happier lives. Wouldn't that be really, really nice?

**About you.** If you're reading this book, you're tentatively trying to take a positive step towards a happier life! That's really exciting! You are excited reading this, now, aren't you?

**About this book.** You will immediately notice that this is a **SLENDER** book. But fewer pages in this case does not mean fewer ideas. There are three reasons for this:

**No psychobabble.** Many self help books fill up hundreds of pages with **USELESS PSYCHOBABBLE** about theoretical constructs related to your brain and your thought processes. This book will not talk about your ego, your superego, Freud, or his favorite brand of cigars, because none of these things have any bearings on giving you practical tips to solving your problems.

**No feel good stories about strangers.** Many books are chock filled with feel good stories from strangers talking about how they learned to feel good about their problems. "Aunt Harriet was upset after a squirrel jumped into her pot pie. But later, she painted the barn red and as she watched the paint dry realized everything would be all right." No, none of

that here; the emphasis will be on you, no soppy sloppy chicken soup stories.

**No general platitudes.** Many self-help books are filled with pages and pages of vague prescriptions to enhancing your mental well-being. “Think good thoughts and all will be well.” Which are neither very informative or useful.

No, this stripped down, lean book gets to the point quickly, and is filled with practical tips to increasing your happiness and efficiency. So judge the book by its **cover**, not its **size**.

## Chapter 1: Increasing Happiness

*“If you’re not living happily, you’re not really living.”*

--Steven Gordon

### The Opportunity Cost of Being Unhappy

Happiness is nice, but why is it so important? To answer that question, let’s consider smokers.

If you were considering smoking (you shouldn’t), and I told you that if you smoked, you would lose 20 years of your life, would you be likely to smoke anyway? Probably not.

Now, if you were an excessive worrier, and I told you that you would probably spend 20 years of your life worrying, are you any different from the prospective smoker? The answer is no; although you live those 20 extra years, they are not years of enjoyment; to the contrary, they are years of unpleasantness. In essence, you are losing 20 years of quality living to unhappiness.

Of course, people don’t see it that way. No one goes through 20 years of solid unhappiness—it is always an hour here, a day here, a few days there. That’s why people don’t see it as such a big problem, because they don’t see all the hours and days of unhappiness stacked up into the years of lost time that they could otherwise be enjoying. But if you could quantify and aggregate the unhappy days into years, you would be very alarmed and want to do something about it.

Consider that today, the day you are reading this, will only occur once in your life. Once it’s over, it’s over. Since it’s a one-time only event, don’t you feel you have a duty to yourself to make it as happy a day as possible? And, to follow through, to make the best of the one time only event of tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that?

The purpose of this book is to help you do just that.

No, don’t stop reading to take a snack break, please turn the page and start improving your life **right now**.

*“Happiness is a mental subroutine that has to be called more frequently from your daily program.”*

--Steven Gordon

## **Being Happy is a Choice**

Right now as you read this children somewhere are playing soccer on a field in gym class. Some of the are enjoying it, others are not. A group of people are working in small, windowless cubicles in an office somewhere; some of those are happy, while others are not. It's the same soccer game, and the same set of cubicles, yet different people have radically different reaction to the same set of external stimuli.

Now, it is true that some kids may like soccer, and some may not, and some may like working in cubicles, doing whatever kind of work one does there (cubicle work?), while others may not. But the ones who aren't happy could be happy, or at the least, less unhappy, if they looked at the situation differently. Unhappiness is generally a subjective state of mind. Unless you're talking about physical pain, it is usually possible to be happy or unhappy about almost any given experience, or at least, more happier than you would otherwise be.

Don't believe me? Haven't you ever had an experience where you were unhappy, and then a parent or spouse or friend or weird man with white handkerchiefs told you why you should be enjoying yourself, and then sure enough, you were? Your parent/spouse/friend/weird white handkerchief man didn't change your circumstances, but only your perception of the event.

You can do the same. If you tell yourself that something isn't so unpleasant, often times, you can make it less unpleasant, even likable. Here are some tips for increasing your happiness. This is the part of the book where you should start paying attention!

### **1) Find hobbies you like**



This is extremely obvious to state, but you can increase your happiness level by finding hobbies you like. “But I don’t like anything!” you may whine. Stop whining and try new things. There must be something you can enjoy. **Think about what you like, and if you can’t do what you like, try to identify the most similar things possible.**

**Some examples:** I’ve always wanted to be a screenwriter. But I have almost zero chance of getting a film made. So I do the next closest thing, I write novels, and publish them on the internet. I don’t have a huge audience, but at least I get to do something close to what I want to do. If you like to paint, draw, or write, you can do the same thing too.

**Another example:** I’ve always wanted to have a red panda as a pet, they are very cute animals. But red pandas are simply not available as pets. So I got a Pomeranian instead. Pomeranians look a lot like red pandas.

**Another example:** It’s hard for me to find new music I like. I generally enjoy science fiction movie soundtracks. So I used software to modify the music I like—to change the pitch and tempo—to make new versions of the songs I like but am growing tired of.

**Another example:** I would love to be President of the United States. I have great ideas on how to resolve most of society’s problems very quickly. But getting elected president is very, very competitive and difficult, and Americans tend to elect very dull people to be president, which probably disqualifies me. So I used to play computer games that allow me to be President and simulate what the experience would be like.

Let’s turn back to you: Say you like sailing, but you live in a place without access to sailboats or the oceans. What about flying a kite? It sounds pathetic at first, but it’s actually somewhat similar—moving something with the wind.

Say you like miniature golf but you live in a culturally deprived area that doesn’t have miniature golf. Go to the forest with your friends and golf clubs and make your own course, digging holes and using twigs as obstacles and barriers.

Suppose you like racing miniaturized race cars but don't have the opportunity to do it. Get a computer game which will let you do it. Again, not the same thing, but somewhat similar. So you see, **if you stop complaining and use your imagination you can find things you will like.**

## **2) Find a job you like**

This is also extremely obvious to mention, but worth mentioning nonetheless. Too many people get stuck with jobs they don't like. Inertia makes them reluctant to move. If you're in a job you don't like, don't just sit there, find something else.

Common objections:

**"I don't know what kind of job to try for."** Translation: the whole situation is so tense for you that you can't even summon the energy to research what you might like to do. The tension, and fear of what another job might be like, are what are keeping you at your current job. After all, while your current job may be unpleasant, at least it is a known, familiar quantity. A new job is filled with unknowns and is a major life change. People naturally worry whether they'll like a new job, whether it will work out, whether they'd be fired, etc. In the presence of a steady paycheck a new job is not something that one seeking stability naturally gravitates towards. But sometimes you have to take risks in order to make gains. If worst comes to worst and the new job doesn't work out, you can quit and find another. There will be hassles and it won't be easy, but you can usually do it. If you can realize this, and remove the stress from searching for a job, then you can get the energy to research new possibilities.

**"There's nothing else I'd like to do."** That may or may not be true, but if you really don't like your job, there are probably there are jobs out there that you would find substantially less objectionable than your current one. Wouldn't it make sense to work at a less unpleasant job, at least reducing your unhappiness? If all choices are equally unpleasant work-wise, try for a job with fewer hours so at least you'll spend less time doing it.

**“I can’t take a pay cut.”** Can’t... or won’t? If it’s a question of feeding your children then I’m sympathetic. If it’s a question of cutting back on vacations and living within a tighter budget I’m less so. What is more important, making more money, or for years spending 8 or more hours a day, nearly every day, at a job you don’t like?

**“I can’t get a job doing what I really want to do.”** That may be so, but perhaps you can find a job doing something closer to what you want to do. For example, if you want to work for the FBI, but can’t get hired, perhaps you can work for the police in a smaller town where there is less competition for jobs. It’s not a glamorous, but it is a similar field. Another example: say you want to be a painter but can’t make a career of it. If you get a job at an art gallery, it won’t showcase your work, but at least you will be working in the same field.

Sometimes the connection is not always intuitive. Say you wanted to be an actor but like most actors can’t get a job in the field. Consider becoming a teacher; while not the same profession, it does have some similarities. An actor performs and a teacher educates, and these are important differences. But students are still an audience and a teacher has to keep a class interested in order to teach them; therein lies some similarities with acting. If you can find these kinds of intrinsic similarities in radically different professions, you can create more job prospects for yourself.

Alternatively, if you can’t get your dream job you can usually pursue it as a hobby, especially if it is in the arts. Paint, write, draw, sing, and act, if it pleases you, but do it for yourself, for your own satisfaction.

**Remember, if you’re employed, you spend most of your waking hours every week at a job. If it’s something you don’t like, that’s a lot of time spent stuck in unhappiness.**

### **3) Enjoy sunshine and sunsets and free wind**

Free wing! Have you ever held out your arms and felt wind blow by your body? It can be quite a pleasurable experience. Wind is currently free, the government has not yet found a way to tax it. You should enjoy the rush

of free air. You should also enjoy the warm glow of sunshine on your face, or the beautiful hues of sunsets.

#### **4) Make your day full of small joys**

Enjoy the small things in life—the soft chair you sit on at work, the feel of acceleration of the car underneath you, the odd face of a fellow student or coworker, the foods you insert into your body at lunch—and learn to look forward to these things as you start your day.

**Example.** Even the act of walking down a hallway can bring you pleasure. Notice the big, thick walls around you—Isn't it amazing to be surrounded by these huge, heavy piles of concrete that don't fall down on you? Notice the hardness of the floor under your feet, carefully press down with each step to feel the sensation fully. Notice the shadows created by your head and arms and legs. Look down the hallway in the distance and see what is at the very end. You can have a lot of fun walking down a hallway!

It may sound ridiculous to expect to enjoy such small things but if you train your mind to enjoy these things and look forward to them you will lead a happier life. Admittedly, it's hard to do, but if you practice, you can gain some degree of skill in doing so.

**Enjoy sensations.** Take special notice to feel the softness of a pillow, or a chair resting against your back, or the hardness of a desk under your touch.

**Enjoy visual pleasures.** Look at people and places around you. Faces and expressions are especially descriptive.

**Enjoy ironies.** Laugh in your mind when things turn out opposite from what is expected. Laugh to yourself when a problem solving meeting is held that solves nothing, when you see a commercial that promises something ridiculous or improbable, or when a politician promises something.

#### **5) Rejoice in the gifts of skills and understanding**

Ever listen to a conversation between two people and sense that you know exactly what's going on beneath the surface? If one coworker says, "Nice shirt!", is she secretly fantasizing about what's underneath it? If someone says, "Would you like to go to this antique store?" that usually means that the person asking this question would like to go. If another coworker cuts off most of her hair and another coworker says the new hairdo "looks great", but you pick up a subtle note of pity in her voice, you understand that the new haircut probably only "looks great" in the dark. If another coworker, who drives a shabby car, makes fun of another coworker's fancy car, it is easy to figure out which car the coworker would rather be driving.

Figuring these things out gives you the gift of understanding, a way of knowing and seeing the world that many others can't. You should take great pride and joy in understanding subtle and/or complicated things, especially things that other people can't. By understanding more, you have a greater appreciation for the complexities of life, and can see it from a larger vantage point. **If you have it, this is a tremendous gift you should be very grateful for.**

You should also appreciate your skills. When you do something well, whether it be a test in school or an assignment at work, you should feel gratified that your skills saw you through to success. Be pleased with yourself and think how good you are at whatever skill or skills you employed. If you did an assignment well at work, take pride at your keen analytical ability (or box lifting or shoe fitting ability, depending on the kind of job you have). If you got an A on a test, be proud of your analytical ability and start planning how to use this to increase your allowance.

### **Pride in your abilities is a key element of happiness.**

I take great pride in my expertise in very small things. I am very good at emphasizing words by stretching out their pronunciation. I consider myself an **artistic communicator**. I think I also have great taste in clothes, having mastered a great blue shirt on blue jeans combination that I wear almost every day, so I consider myself a **masterful dresser**. I am also a very **efficient shopper**, having the ability to dart in to a store,

get exactly what I want, and leave quickly. These are all very small things, but by taking pride in small things, you can lead a happier life.

## **6) Getting a dog**

If you like animals, dogs are excellent pets. They are generally very loyal and loving and can be a lot of fun. Cats, on the other hand, are not so expressive emotionally speaking and can be somewhat aloof. Goldfish are even less desirable, because you cannot touch them, they do not express emotions, and they tend to eat each other. But dogs are a great source of thousands of hours of love and companionship. All you have to do is feed them and walk behind them with a small shovel. If you do get a dog, the best kind is a breed called a Pomeranian. They are very fluffy and adorable and can bring you a lot of pleasure.

## **7) Slow down and enjoy**

Slow down at key points in your life when you are receiving pleasure, such as enjoying the taste of food, the receipt of praise, or pleasant hugging experiences. Focus on the moment, enjoy the experience, and try to remember it in great detail, so you can replay it later in your mind, and enjoy the experience again and again. Your mind should be like a video recorder, which records your best moments that you can replay again and again for your entertainment. So many times people have joyful moments, think “That’s nice” so very briefly, and then don’t give it a second thought, moving on to other topics.

**That is so wasteful**, like taking a bite out of an apple and throwing the rest away. You are not savoring the emotional experience. **Linger over periods of enjoyment and remember as much as you can about them** If you are hugging someone, whether it be a husband or a wife or a cuddly animal, enjoy the sensations and don’t be in a hurry. If you are enjoying a finely cooked steak, savor the taste in your mouth and chew slowly. These moments are important to more fully experiencing life.

### **8) Remember when things were worse**

Remember how much better things are now than they were before. For most people, things tend to improve over time, so this should be easy to do. Do you have a better job or boss or teacher or friends than you once did? Do you have more freedoms or options than you used to? Think about that!

Whenever I'm unhappy, I think back to how things are much, much better than when I was a child. When I was a child I was forced to eat what I was told, go where I was told to, and study was I was ordered to. Now, of course, as an adult I am freed from these limitations. I still cherish these freedoms that most adults take for granted, knowing that I didn't always have them.

If you're an adult, you can do this too.

If you're a student, think back to when you were an even younger child, and had even less freedom. By contrast, you have a lot more freedom now.

If you're a really old person, and things are worse for you now than they were before, then do the reverse—think about when times were better and try to enjoy them in your mind.

## **The Virtues of Self Control**

*“Do you control your emotions, or do they control you?”*

--Steven Gordon (as well as a few other people)

It’s all about control. This book is all about controlling. Yourself. Your mind. Your emotions, and your patterns of thoughts. If you can do this, you will lead a happier and more efficient life. If you cannot, you will not.

Typically, people resist this concept by thinking, “Well, that’s all fine and nice to write that. But the mind really can’t be controlled, like an arm or a leg. I can’t control what feeling or thought comes into my head.” And that may be true. But you can learn to better control how you react to thoughts and feelings that come into your head.

Did you know that when people smile and laugh they feel happier, even if they are not really happy? It’s true. Try an experiment; every time you turn on a water faucet, force yourself to smile or laugh. If you do it long enough, you will begin, as a reflex, to actually feel happy as you turn on the water. It’s sounds ridiculous, but it can work.

If you can make yourself happy turning on the water, you can condition yourself to be happy at other times as well. You can also condition yourself not to be unhappy at other times. It’s important to know when you’re unhappy, but there is no need to dwell on it.

Once you have reached this degree of control you will be a happier person. In fact, once you have achieved a degree of control over your feelings you will start feeling happier in a new way. You will feel happy having mastered your feelings. Feelings are great—they let you enjoy life, and they can help you process information. But sometimes they are also a hindrance. If you control them, you can lead a happier and more efficient life.

**Consider why Mr. Spock is so popular.** Consider Mr. Spock from Star Trek. Why was he so widely admired? He had a tremendous intellect, and he tended to appeal to the most attractive Earth women, but what was so interesting about him was that by controlling his emotions, he could focus all his mental energies on the problem at hand, making him



more effective than Kirk, Bones, and Scotty combined. There was a classic episode where the ship was sabotaged by a pretty woman and was about to blow up, and Mr. Scott was trying to prevent it by effecting repairs in a Jeffries Tube. Scotty was very upset because he was worried about the ship blowing up, and that hampered his effectiveness. But Mr. Spock, also aware that the ship was about to blow up, and undoubtedly not pleased by the prospect, didn't allow his unhappiness to interfere with the work, and as a result he was able, under great pressure, to give cool-headed and concise advice on how to restore the matter-anti-matter containment fields. It's that effectiveness people admire in Mr. Spock, and what you will admire in yourself (and perhaps others will admire in you) when you attain a degree of control.

Allow yourself to feel joy when you prevail over an emotion or temptation. Do you feel an urge to watch television instead of doing work when know you shouldn't? Smile as you feel the temptation wash over you as you look at the remote control. And then, once you exercise control, allow yourself to feel a flash of triumph because you've won over this temptation. Or, if you haven't won that battle with temptation, pick another battle and win it. Start by winning small, easier battles and work your way up to harder ones. Tell yourself to feel good every time you exercise control and win over your impulses.

**Example:** You always feel the urge to eat two cookies and sometimes have the urge to eat a third. Don't try to control yourself at first by preventing yourself from eating the first or second cookie. Start by trying to prevent yourself from eating the third one. If you are successful, label yourself the **Master of Chocolate Chip Cookies**.

**Another example:** You usually watch two or three hours of television each night to distract yourself from other work. Don't start by trying to fight the impulse to watch television altogether; try to draw the line at two or two and a half hours, feel the satisfaction when you are successful, and then try to reduce the amount further from there.

If you haven't been reading any of the above and just tuned in now, **pick easy impulses at first to exercise control over.**

I enjoy a lot of satisfaction out of my ability to control my mind. I feel great joy when I wake up in the middle of the night, unable to fall asleep. In the past I would have to read for an hour or two or toss and turn or squeeze my dog's furry tail. Now I have such mastery of my mind that I can relax almost instantly and usually fall back to sleep within several minutes. I relish this level of mental mastery because it makes my life better, but it also makes me feel more proficient and in more control of my life. I feel superior—not in comparison to other people, but in comparison to how I used to be.

The mastery of yourself should bring you similar pleasure as well. Think of yourself as working up to a black belt in self mind control, and feel pleased with yourself as you exercise more and more control over yourself. A person who controls himself is a most impressive individual.

## Have Fun With Very Simple Things

### Your Verbal Font

A “font” is the style of lettering that appears on your computer screen. But you have a font too, a verbal font which describes how you speak. My standard font is Steven Gordon New Jersey 12 point. If I talk loudly it is Steven Gordon New Jersey 32 point, if I whisper it is Steven Gordon New Jersey 4 point, if I am aggressive it is Steven Gordon New Jersey bold 12 point, if I am making a point I am using Steven Gordon New Jersey underline 12 point, and if I am being ironic I am using Steven Gordon New Jersey italics 12 point.

The way you speak can be made to be very interesting. Why do so many people find the way Homer Simpson speaks to be amusing? Because he stretches out words when he talks about things he likes. “Hmmmm... Doooughnnuuuuts...” If you want to make a humorous point, you can stretch out a word here or there or use some other similarly innovative method to give it emphasis. Just don’t do it too frequently, or else you might drive all your friends away. You can also think of other interesting ways to spice up your style of speech. For example, I like to say “Ishue” instead of “issue” and “Shedule” instead of schedule when I am using Steven Gordon London 12 point.

**Accents.** Altering your pattern of speech with a fake accent is a very easy way of having fun with friends in a harmless way. Try speaking with an Eastern European accent, or a Caribbean or a Scottish accent. It’s best not to do this in serious, business or school conversations, of course. Actually, the best time to change your accent is to do it with complete strangers, such as a cashier or salesman in a store, who, if you’re doing it properly, can never know that you’re not really from another country. You can make it like a game, seeing if you’re good enough to fool them.

How do you learn a new accent? You don’t need any special talents. Simply listen to clips of people speaking in different accents on the internet. After they say a sentence, you say the sentence in the same way. Practice until you get good enough to try to fool others.

**Never Again Say “Hello, how are you?”**

Ever have someone you barely know say, “How are you?” even though you know there’s no way in the world they could possibly care? Ever have someone say “How are you?” when walking past you at ten miles per hour, a rate allowing for an answer at most one second in length? What is that all about?

As a polite custom, people say hello to each other, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But then, to show that they are especially sensitive, people at some point in the past started asking “How are you?”

Remember, you’re walking past someone else, and they’re walking past you, and you don’t have any real time to respond—you’re have no chance to give a real answer. It’s not meant to be a real question. It’s just a nicety, meant to show the questioner cares, but the questioner usually has no time or interest to listen to a real answer; he just wants a bland one word answer to show he had the “caring conversation”.

This sort of phony behavior is not conducive to true happiness. If you say something you should generally mean it unless there is some important underlying entertainment value involved. Therefore, you should only say “Hello” to people and not “How are you?”, unless you really mean it. If people say “How are you?” to you, here are possible responses you can give to insincere questioners: “Taciturn” (Silent), “Static” (Unchanging), “Variable” or my favorite, “Thank you for asking! Do you have a few minutes we can stop and talk about it?” When I was in college I used to have preprinted cards with the words “Fine” on them which I would hand out to questioners—form answers for form questioners. (At the time none of the superbright Yale students around me understood the irony of what I was doing. It was very sad.)

If you really want to know how someone is doing, ask a more probing question, such as “What is in your mind?” or “What are your feelings?” Such non-standard questions are more likely to provoke more thoughtful replies.

**A note about seeking happiness through drinks and/or drugs**

People who drink alcohol and/or take drugs are to be pitied. They take drugs or drink alcohol in order to feel good. That strongly implies that they can't feel good without taking drugs or alcohol, that their own personality can't make them happy. So by using drugs or alcohol they are telling the world that they have a flawed personality and they are unable to enjoy life without taking a mind altering substance.

But alcohol is a legal substance! True, and if you drink it only for an occasional taste, that's all right. But if you drink it for the alcoholic effect, then you are taking a drug to change your personality, to make yourself silly and dopey and vomitish. In the dopey scifi novel *Brave New World*, the working class population were called "D's", were portrayed as mindless, wrinkled little men, and they took an addictive drug called "soma" to make them happy, just like some people in our society take drugs and alcohol to do the same.

If you have any friends who drink or take drugs, you should pity them. Perhaps you should also give them a copy of this book, because where there's life, there's hope.

## **Chapter 2: How to Deal With Boring Experiences**

*“If you’re bored, you’re giving up way too easily.”*

--Steven Gordon

Sometimes people have experiences that are just boring, such as sitting in a bus or train station for hours on end, or sitting in attendance at a social function that isn’t very interesting. Those are situations where the "glass is half full"--that is, you are not suffering, but at the same time, you are not enjoying yourself. What can you do about boredom?

Simply end it.

From a practical perspective, consider that there are and will be many, many times in your life when you will be bored--standing in line, waiting for a lecture or meeting to begin, sitting in traffic, waiting for someone to give you something, or standing in line at a cash register, among other examples.

**Boredom kills as many people as smoking.** A not insignificant portion of your life is spent being bored. Let's hypothesize that if you add up all the minutes and seconds you are bored, it adds up to 20 years of your life. That's 20 lost years of your life! It would little different than if you died 20 years before your time!

What's the solution, then? To change your life to avoid these boring times? Unfortunately, many times we simply cannot avoid boring stretches of time, unless all traffic disappears from the roads and all people become interesting and quick and efficient. Therefore, since not all boring situations can be changed or avoided, it is only logical that you work on coping strategies. If you cannot avoid the boring situation, change your perception of it so that it becomes more interesting (or, at least less uninteresting) to you.

You are probably thinking that this suggestion does not sound realistic. But if you have a firm control of your mind and you think creatively, it is quite possible. What follows are some tips for turning the boring into the interesting:

### **1) Make lists**

When you expect to have a boring experience, bring something interesting to occupy your mind--a book or a puzzle magazine or a laptop or a handheld game. Problem solved! Or is it? Obviously, if you're in a social situation reading a book, this might not be a realistic solution. So plan B is to bring paper and a pen with you and play the game of lists. What is lists? Lists is where you make lists of things that you know of and enjoy. Science fiction fans can make a list of nearly every character in the Star Wars movies, and when they're done with that, a list of all planets and names of ships (I can do this! (Your lack of surprise does not surprise me.)). Sports fans can list teams, names of players, and scores. Fans of a television show can produce a one sentence summary of the plot for every episode. One of my specialties was listing all 100 United States Senators or the names of all 50 states in America or the names of nearly every country on the planet. You can have a great time doing it, it can take some time to do, and it's inconspicuous to do, because, after all, all other people see you doing is writing on paper.

### **2) Transcribe movies**

Another thing you can do is describe, scene by scene, the plot of your favorite movie. "The Star Destroyer fired at the corvette. It was hit amid ships. C3PO remarked that there would be no escape for the Princess this time. R2 gave a beep of joy; he hated Princess Leia's guts. Imperial troops prepared to board the ship; rebel soldiers with backwards looking helmets lined up obediently in the entry corridor to make themselves easy targets." This technique works not just with scifi movies, but all kinds of films—action, comedies, even sensitive romance films. If you were so inclined (though I can't imagine why) you can describe every scene of Harry meeting Sally. The point is that occupying your mind with details from the film distracts you from your boredom.

### **3) People watching**

Usually when you are stuck in a boring place you can at least see other people. Start looking around and play a series of games, to find the person with... the longest hair. The shortest hair. The curliest hair. The straightest hair. The biggest nose. The smallest nose. The biggest eyebrows. The biggest eyebrow. The greenest eyes. The biggest lips. The smallest lips. The biggest chin. The smallest chin. The roundest face. The thinnest face. The longest arms. The longest legs. The tallest person. The shortest person.

Then once you've done that, become a fashion consultant and grade their clothes. Give each of them a grade of A to F on their fashion style. Then think about their clothes and guess where they'd most appropriately be going—to the gym, or a fancy restaurant, or to bed, or somewhere else?

Another variant of what you can do is to create a HUD, a “heads up display”. If you're unfamiliar with that term, recall the Terminator films. In Terminator II we got to see what the Terminator saw when he was looking for clothes that would fit him. He started analyzing people with his internal visual display, making outlines of people in the room and messages about them would appear around their bodies on the Terminator's internal visual display. Pretend you are a terminator and that your neural net is processing the people around you. Make each one glow or flash as a caption appears in front of their body telling you something humorous about them. You can walk around with an internal HUD feeding you interesting commentary to amuse yourself.

#### **4) Radical fantasizing**

Do you see a pretty woman or handsome man where you are? Imagine taking him or her out to dinner and sharing your feelings with him or her. Animate him or her in your mind, making him or her an interesting or even fawning dinner companion.

**Dinner with your favorite enemy.** This is also a good thing to do with friends, and an even better thing to do with enemies. You can actually control the image of someone you don't like in your mind, transport yourselves to your favorite restaurant, and have a leisurely



dinner together. Then have your enemy say fawning things such as, “I’m here to please you. What would you like me to say or do? If you like, I will start a fan club in your name and be not only a member, but also the president! Also, would you please give me your mailing address so I can have all my future birthday presents sent directly to you?” Having your enemies say how much they like you and go on and on about how great you are can be very amusing in your mind.

**Change the voice.** If the person you’re having a conversation with is someone you know, you can make that person sound like the way he or she actually talks. But if that bores you, you can change his or her voice, even giving a woman a man’s voice or vice versa.

**Change the wardrobe.** Another twist is that you can augment or change what your dinner companion is wearing—have a feather stick out of his head, or have her wear a fruit basket on the top of hers, or have him wearing nothing but a sheet, or have her dressed in tight fitting scuba gear.

**Have dinner in Hollywood.** Another variant of the radical fantasizing scenario is not simply to have dinner with someone around you but to eat with a famous actor or actress whose mind intrigues you (because, after all, that’s what most interesting about actors and actresses). Just animate him or her with your mind, make him/her smile and flirt with you, and you’ll have a great time.

## **5) Observe Colors and Shapes**

If you’re in an environment where you can’t really see people or stare at them without getting into trouble, try staring at colors and shapes. Look at the colors of the floor, walls, and furniture around you. What do you think of these colors? Note each one, and don’t just define them as “blue”, “green”, or “white.” All these colors come in shades. Think of what kind of green it reminds you of—the green of grass or the green of money, perhaps. Pay special attention to the floor tiles—ever notice that in business and school environments they often have these dark streaks on them, that look a little like smeared bird droppings? Look at the patterns

and thickness of these smears and see what direction they are pointing towards.

Then notice shapes and patterns. Is the ceiling divided into squares? Count them, all of them. Look at the lights in the ceiling. How do they shine light on the ground? Are there areas where the light is brighter, and the light is dimmer? What sorts of shapes and patterns do they form on the ground? What do they remind you of? Do you see any pipes or wires running along the ceiling? What do you think they are for? Where do you think they go? Can you imagine them snaking through the building--imagine the building as a three dimensional transparent object with the wires and pipes running through it. Then imagine the people standing around the building--around you, above you, below you, in the other rooms. Imagine yourself roaming the building like the wind. Then in your mind zoom in and out of the transparent building and rotate your perspective with different angles to get different views.

## **6) Exercise**

If you're in an environment where it is socially acceptable to walk or move around during the boring time (such as waiting for a bus or plane, but not in class or during a meeting), do so. Pace back and forth around the room. Walk very slowly at first, slowly putting each foot down so you can enjoy the sensation of pressure on your foot as you land it on the ground beneath you. Then try imitating different walking styles, like that of an elephant, or a tiger, or a penguin. You can also imitate fictional vehicles, such as an AT-AT, the big heavy clumping walkers from The Empire Strikes Back. They walk and step very slowly, very heavily, making a loud clunking sound (your mind can supply this) with every step.

Another form of exercise is flapping your arms, rotating your head, bending your knees, and touching your toes. If you know karate and are in a socially permissible environment you can practice blocks and stretches; if you are a woman or a sensitive vegetarian man, you can practice yoga.

**Hidden exercise.** If you are in an environment such as a bus station where overt exercise is not socially acceptable, try subtle forms of exercise. No one can see you flex and unflex your toes inside your shoes. Do that 20 times. Then tighten and relax your lower legs 20 times. Then the same with your upper legs, arms, fingers, hands, and the rest of your body, each 20 times. That will take you at least 15 minutes to do and will occupy your mind while you are bored. It may help to relax you too.

### **7) Daydream about a happy event**

**o Nice times you had with friends and family.** Think of nice times you had with friends and family. Think of what they said and did and what you said and did to bring you happiness. Obviously the closer the relative or friend, the more intense the emotion will be. If you have a spouse or parent or child you happen to like, think slowly, step by step, in great detail about the favorite activities you like to do together. If you have a girlfriend, think about your favorite activity you like to do with her—a great game of chess you had with her, for example. If you have parents, think about the time they took you to Disney World, or a place not as good as Disney World. If you have a good friend, think about all the fun games you’ve played, or all the great tests you’ve taken in school together.

**o Greatest accomplishments.** Daydream about some of your greatest accomplishments whether in sports, business, or your personal life. Remember them step by step—not simply that you hit a home run, for example, but how you stepped up to the plate, waited for the pitch, skipped the first one, made contact with the second pitch, send it out into left field, started running to first base, and so on. If one of your greatest accomplishments was getting a promotion at work, remember how you got it, how your boss praised you, whether he seemed to mean it, what the envy of your coworkers tasted like, and how you felt at the time and celebrated afterwards. If you’re a student, think about your success in a sporting event, how far you kicked or hit or threw a ball, and how everyone admired your amazing ball-handling skills. If you are not sports

inclined, you can think of academic achievements, how you got an A in a difficult class or test, and how everyone seemed to want to sit right next to you in subsequent exams.

**o Praise.** Think about times you have received great praise. Think exactly what others have said about you and how that makes you feel. Have you been told you are smart, or kind, or helpful? Think about what made the speaker said and how it makes you feel.

**o Tastes of food.** Think about times you ate your favorite foods and, focusing on the flavor, imagine yourself eating it bite by bite. Memories of fatty foods tend to be the most enjoyable. Don't worry about mental calories, they aren't an issue here. If you get a nightmarish vision of unpleasant vegetables, try to remove them from your mind and calm yourself.

**o Vacations.** Think about your favorite vacations, and remember them step by step. I once had a fabulous vacation mountain climbing, and I remember all the views of valleys, mountains and hills, and when I recall the memories, I think of each view like a snapshot. If you're a student, think of Disney World, or places that aspire to but will never be Disney World. If you're an adult, think of the great time you had swimming in the Caribbean. You can also think about experiences that were great not to have—with sharks, for example. Try to remember specific scenes in your vacations that gave you the most pleasure and relive the specific sights, tastes, and sensations you felt then.

For example, I frequently climb mountains at a resort called Mohonk in upstate New York. I remember not just "rock climbing", but snapshots of giant, grey boulders looming over me. I remember they were cool but rough to the touch. I remember the bright green of the evergreen trees surrounding the boulder field I was in. I remember the cool, free wind blowing past my body. I remember the unique smell of pine needles. I remember the sight of clouds going miles into the distance. I remember the feeling of the hard rock, pressed against my back, as I crawled from

one boulder to another. I remember the small stress on my arms as I climbed wooden ladders set against the rock face. I remember the sound of pebbles scraping under my feet as I moved from boulder to boulder. In short, I remembered a lot more than simply “Climbing rocks at Mohonk.” You should remember your vacations in that degree of detail, slowly, step by step, as well.

### **8) Daydream that you are in a movie**

Pretend that you are the hero in your favorite scene of one of your favorite movies and act out the part in your mind. If you’re a big Star Wars fan, imagine you are Luke Skywalker on Jabba the Hutt’s sail barge fighting in every direction to save Princess Leia from having to wear a metal bikini for Jabba’s visual pleasure. If you enjoy the Matrix, pretend you are in the scene where Neo is fighting 100 copies of Agent Smith. Pick your own favorite movie and make yourself the hero. If you like romance films, pretend you are being romanced (if you are a woman) or romancing a female (if you are a man).

### **9) Touch things**

The sense of touch is so underrated. We spend so much time looking at things that the sense of touch is often forgotten. If you have down time, try touching surfaces around you—tables, chairs, walls, objects, to see what they feel like. Rub your fingers a long way up and down available surfaces. How does it feel? Smooth? Cold? Rough? Think about the sensations. If you see people staring at you as you do this, give them a big smile and invite them to join you.

### **10) Taking a close up look at surfaces**

Everyone has seen walls and floors and desktops before, but all of these have usually been seen by looking straight at them from a distance. What if you lowered your head to just an inch or two above a countertop and then looked over the length of the countertop from that unique vantage point? Looking at things close up, a simple countertop would appear like a

long and wide horizon to you. Try it with different surfaces to see how it looks. Not only does a simple surface like a wall or a floor look like a long horizon, they often have interesting reflections of the rest of the room on their polished surfaces. Great for hours of fun!

### **11) Listen to music**

Listen to your favorite music in your mind. Replay one of your favorite songs in your mind, slowly (don't rush through it!!!), and focus on the sounds of specific instruments playing. As each part of the sound is playing trying to visualize the instruments being played. Once you get used to doing this, imagine yourself not merely listening to music but actually sitting in a theater where the music is being played live by an orchestra in front of you. Imagine hearing the music loud and clear in front of you, and sitting back in an expensive theater chair enjoying the performance. You can listen to several songs that way and distract yourself for some time.

### Chapter 3: Being Happier At Work Or In School

*“If you have to spend a lot of time doing work, is it really a smart idea to hate it?”*

--Steven Gordon

Motivating yourself to study or work doesn't come naturally, especially if you have, shall we say, absolutely ZERO INTEREST in whatever subject you need to study or work on. Spending a lot of time on work that you have no interest in certainly reduces your happiness which is why the solution to this problem is a topic in this book. I will now teach you how to subjectively make your work more interesting and reduce your unhappiness with spending the time needed to complete it. But first, you must understand why some kinds of work are fun.

**Why is “work” in computer games fun?** Have you ever played a computer game? If you are under the age of 50 and have an interest in the joys of life, the answer is probably yes. Did you know that computer games involve a lot of work? It may surprise you, but this is true.

When you play a typical swords and monsters fantasy game, you have to kill a lot of low level creatures before you can become a high level character. Killing the same low level creatures over and over is a lot like work. When you play a first person shooter game, often times when you are playing a difficult level, such as when unseen snipers are shooting at you, you must replay the same level again and again and again to figure out how to survive and get to the interesting part. **That's a lot of work for a computer game.**

And yet you do this sort of work willingly without anyone telling you to do so and without getting paid for it. The reason why you do this is because you are very interested in the overall subject, whether it be stabbing monsters with swords or shooting aliens with an uzi nine millimeter. You are willing to tolerate boring stretches because you enjoy most of the overall game you are playing.

**The solution: make work into a game.** If you can make work into a game, you will tend to like work more (or at least dislike it less). What you really need to do is to pretend to be playing a game while you are doing your work. There are several ways of doing this.

One way is to pretend you are controlling military forces and fighting other game forces that have to be destroyed. Examples from popular culture are as follows:

Suppose you have to write three essays (or memos), one small one, one medium sized one and one large one. The medium and large essays require some research. Below are some game simulations you can pretend to play in your mind to help you get the work done:

**World War II Navy Fantasy.** Start by pretending you control a World War II navy fleet—the aircraft carrier Enterprise, the battleships Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and a small squadron each of light cruisers and destroyers. The Enterprise has six squadrons—two torpedo bomber groups, two dive bombers, and two F4F fighter escort groups (“Wildcats”).

These forces represent your mental efforts available to complete your work. The biggest parts of your mental energy are naturally symbolized by the larger ships, the Enterprise and the battleships. The smaller parts of your mental efforts are symbolized by the smaller ships, especially the fighter and bomber craft.

**Fantasize about the nature of the work to be done.** Your next step is to pretend that the three essays you have to write are not just essays but enemy ships. The small essay could be a small enemy cruiser, the second essay could be symbolized as a medium sized enemy battle cruiser, and the third largest essay could be a large enemy battleship, like the Japanese super battleship Yamato. Always symbolize larger assignments with larger enemy forces. The research to be done for the essays could be symbolized by enemy squadrons of island based support fighters.



**Act out the game in your mind.** Now that you have defined the forces arrayed in your mind you can begin to play the “game”. First, imagine yourself as being the strong and powerful battleships Pennsylvania and New Jersey. “Pulverize” the smallest essay, the cruiser, by actually writing your essay. After it is written, relax for a moment and imagine the New Jersey blowing up the cruiser with volleys of enormous shells from its huge forward turrets. One enemy ship has been destroyed! In your mind you’re symbolizing your progress by blowing up an enemy ship. You should feel a wave of joy, as if you had just blown up the cruiser in a computer game.

Now focus on the second essay. It’s an enemy battle cruiser. But before you can take it out, you have to eliminate a screen of surrounding land based fighters, which symbolize the research to be done. Do they research, and then treat yourself to the refreshing mental images of your F4F Wildcat fighters blasting the enemy fighters to pieces. Then write the second essay. When done treat yourself to the image of the battleship Pennsylvania blowing up the battle cruiser. Feel the sense of wonder and accomplishment at blowing up such a large ship.

Now focus on the third essay, using the Enterprise to “dispatch it”, sending out squadrons of dive bombers and torpedo bombers to “sink” it, and allow yourself to experience appropriate mental images when you’re done. Although you will be doing work, hopefully your mind will begin to treat it like an enjoyable game and you will almost want to write that next essay so you can get further along in the game.

**Army Fantasy.** You can do the same thing by imagining that your mental energies are a trained military force. Say that all your mental energies are represented by a battalion; you can break that down into companies and platoons to handle larger and smaller work assignments. Visualize each assignment as an enemy force to be fought; the larger the assignment, the larger the enemy force. Choose whatever nationality for the enemy that appeals to you, or make them zombies or robots if you prefer post-modern or other fantasy warfare.

Then wage the battles in the same way I described above. Send company sized units out to complete larger sized assignments, and platoon sized groups to destroy smaller ones. You can even differentiate your units, having heavy weapons platoons and special forces commandos to augment your regular frontline units when a specially difficult task at hand. If you have trouble forcing yourself to do some of your work, imagine calling in a special Navy Seal team to augment your forces and begin the battle.

It works exactly this way: you can't get yourself to write the next essay, which you represent to be a company of enemy soldiers heavily dug in into fortified positions. So imagine a special forces unit, parachuting behind enemy lines, sabotaging the enemy positions and allowing you easier access to their territory. By imagining that your toughest units have made the "enemy" easier to attack, you should feel that it is easier to write your next essay.

When you have completed a work task or assignment, you have "won" a battle. Allow yourself to feel a sense of accomplishment and move on to the next assignment, all in an effort to win the war—the war being all assignments currently facing you. If you think of doing work as a battle to be fought and you like war gaming, it will make it easier for you to get things done.

**Star Wars fantasy.** This will be similar to the other simulations, just chance the nature of the forces you control and confront. You can pretend you control an Imperial fleet—the Super Star Destroyer Executor, the Imperial Class Star Destroyer Relentless, and the smaller Victory Class Star Destroyer Vanguard. Each Star Destroyer has four squadrons of TIE Fighters and TIE Bombers, except the Executor, which has 12, including two squadrons of special TIE Advanced star fighters. These forces represent your mental efforts available to complete your work.

Your next step is to pretend that the three essays you have to write are not just essays but enemy rebel ships. The small essay could be a small Corellian corvette (similar to Princess Leia's courier ship, the Tantive IV), the second essay could be symbolized as a medium sized

Nebulon B Frigate, and the third largest essay could be a large Mon Calamari attack cruiser

Once again, do the work bit by bit and as you do so, pretend you are playing a game blowing up the rebel ships and imagine them being destroyed.

**Sports fantasy.** Imagine you command a team of large, beefy baseball, football, basketball, or dodge ball players who don't use steroids (remember, this is fantasy). This team represents your mental effort available to do work. Each time you spend the effort to score a goal or a point, imagine that as work being done.

**Lord of the Rings fantasy.** Instead of modern armies, you can use armies of humans and elves and dwarves to fight your "battles". You can fight orcs and goblins and trolls and dragons.

**Anti-Terrorism Unit fantasy.** You can also imagine yourself in command of an elite anti-terrorism unit, who has to end hostage taking and other paramilitary situations, and pretend with each assignment you complete that you are fighting terrorists.

**What if you don't like war simulations?** Not everyone likes war simulations. Many women and very sensitive vegetarian men don't care for them. But there are other alternatives for you to role play:

**Decorating Fantasy.** Pretend you are decorating your home but don't have the money to buy furniture or carpeting or lighting. Pretend that you make money by completing assignments (which, actually, might very well be true!). Visualize a completely empty home. Each time you complete a small assignment, in your imagination think that you make a little money, just enough to buy one small piece of furniture for your home, like a lamp or chair. Every time you complete a large work assignment, permit yourself to buy a larger piece of furniture, like a desk or table.

Each time you give yourself permission to buy something, imagine yourself shopping over the possibilities in your mind, and when you settle on the right one, imagine how it looks in your new home and think about the pleasure it gives you to decorate the place slowly but properly. The decorating should only be complete, however, when you have finished all your work. In later work assignments, you can redecorate from scratch, or allow your self to upgrade with fancier and fancier furniture.

**Clothing Fantasy.** Imagine yourself dressed in dirty rags. Each time you complete a small piece of work imagine yourself with a small article of nice clothing, like a socks. If you complete a larger assignment, imagine yourself with nice pants or a shirt. After you are fully clothed, permit yourself to change to other clothes for variety as additional assignments are completed. After you complete each bit of work, allow your mind to enjoy the process of choosing an item of clothes to wear and imagine how it looks on you.

### **Using Fantasies to Do Chores**

This kind of fantasizing can also be helpful in motivating yourself to do chores.

**Shopping.** If you are a man, imagine yourself in charge of a commando team that has to infiltrate an enemy fortress and retrieve several important data discs as quickly as possible. The navy is giving you a ride in a small landing craft (your car), but when the craft lands, you and your commando team are in charge of the mission. Once the landing craft stops and your team quickly disembarks onto the LZ (landing zone), move quickly and steadily to your target.

Once you are inside, walk quickly through the store and number the things you have to buy. Allow yourself to feel “mission accomplished” as you retrieve each item. When your purchases are complete, exfiltrate back to the LZ and feel good at a mission well done.

If you are a woman, imagine that you are shopping not just in any store but one of the fanciest stores in New York or Paris. Imagine doormen, plush carpeting, and other fancy things you would find in the fanciest store. Imagine that each item you are buying is a very expensive item. A bag of potato chips can become a Ming vase. A blank notepad can become an impressionist French painting (not much imagination required there). Enjoy the act of shopping for such expensive luxury items.

**Driving a Car.** If you have to drive a car for some distance, pretend you are the navigator on a large boat, or airplane, or spaceship, and you are in command of your speed and direction. Don't just drive to your destination, pilot your way there, enjoy the journey. And marvel at what you're controlling. Imagine all the thousands of tons of steel under your control, so responsive to your every direction, and the great responsibility you have to carefully control your vessel. Always keep in mind that you are a small person with a giant vehicle around you—if you turn the wheel to the right, this giant metal thing all around you turns to the right. It's like being in an army tank or a giant Japanese metal walking robot. Think of the tremendous power you have!

But always remember to drive responsibly!

**Cleaning Up.** If you have to clean up an area, you can use variants of the fantasy tactics mentioned above—pretend you are fighting a battle, or beautifying a palace, or you can take a Sim City approach. Pretend you are an urban planner going to clean up an area of “urban blight”. Take a small part of the area that requires cleaning and make it your own. Subdivide the area that has to be cleaned—if you have to clean four rooms, lie down in a quarter of one room, on the floor. Just lie there and look around you for a moment or two. Say to yourself that everything around you is under your control and command, and that as the person in charge of this small region, you want to make it as best looking as possible. Don't worry or think about the rest of the house or even the rest of the room right now. Tell yourself you are only responsible for that piece of the room in your view right now, that for now this and this alone

is your “kingdom”. Then summon the energy to fix it and make it right. When you’re done, “adopt” another piece of your room and do the same thing.

### **Other Ways to Use Fantasies to Motivate Yourself**

In the fantasies above you pretended that you commanded a large military force of some type to get your missions done. That works for some people but others require more personal connections. That’s why other, more personal options exists instead of pretending you have a fantasy army to do your work for you.

**Pretend you are an action hero.** Imagine your favorite action hero, whether it is Batman, Superman, Wolverine, Rambo, or someone else. Pretend you are that person when you do your work. Every time you complete a small assignment, imagine you are defeating a bunch of enemies. Every time you complete a large assignment, imagine you are beating an evil boss, like the Joker (Batman) or the superintendent of a North Vietnamese prisoner of war camp who is a karate expert (as in Rambo 2). Every time you complete a work task, think of a specific scene in a relevant movie where the hero is beating up the enemies. If you like Star Wars, imagine the famous sail barge scene from Return of the Jedi where seconds after Luke Skywalker plucks his light saber from the air he slices up a dozen enemies in short order. Think about how quickly Luke was with his light saber, and imagine yourself being that quick with your paperwork. By equating common school or business work with fast moving martial arts combat, you can make the work experience more enjoyable for yourself, and give yourself a powerful incentive to go on to the next assignment. Imagine incomplete work to be a bunch of bad guys out there, taunting you. The only way to shut them up is to do your next assignment, giving you more of an impetus to do so.

**Pretend you are a very smart and/or very effective person.** Of course, if you’re reading this you are almost certainly already a smart person, but imagine that you are an even smarter person. Not just smart,

but very effective. You can think about someone famous from history, such as Einstein, or someone closer to home, such as the best worker or student in your workplace or school. Then pretend you are him or her and imagine how quickly he would do the work in front of you. Actually in your mind pretend you are him and do the work as if you were him. A smart, effective person such as [insert name here] wouldn't tremble at the thought of doing a little work, he would just dash through it, wouldn't he? And since you are pretending to be him, in your mind, you can do the same thing. If you are successful in temporarily convincing yourself that you are like this smart, effective person, the work will be done much more quickly.

**Pretend that someone is issuing orders.** If you feel too lazy or to tired to do a task, pretend that someone is giving you orders. Imagine that a stern military commander or action hero or demanding fashion designer/interior decorator is ordering you around, with very small, specific orders. Not simply, "Get up and do your work!" But rather "Get up!" "Good!" "Sit at your desk!" "Good! Now read the instructions!" "Task completed. Now write the first paragraph!" "Good! I will permit you a sixty second work break." "Resume work! Complete writing the second paragraph now!"

### **Grade Yourself on Your Effort**

One other way to motivate yourself is to mentally grade your efforts in your mind to get your work done. Except that you're not usually giving yourself a grade on how well you did the work—usually the difficulty is getting yourself to do the work at all, doing it well should be first nature to you. Instead, you should grade yourself on your quickness and efficiency in completing the work.

**Example:** Clifford Croft wrote two short essays, but it took him all evening to do it when it should have taken him only two hours. Instead he took off time to watch television, daydream, and read a book. He gave himself a "C" for effort because of all the wasted time that could have been put to better use, and thought to himself that he should try to do better next time, to get a better grade.

**Example:** Steven Quick had to write a ten page memo. He started immediately, only taking a short break after writing the seventh page and another short break after he was done, before he checked it over. It only took him two hours to write, and because he did it so efficiently, he gave himself an “A”, and felt good that he had accomplished a task so well.

You will find when you grade yourself like this, you will feel the urge in the future to do better to earn better grades.

### **Make Your Work More Humorous In Your Mind**

Another thing you can do is make your work more humorous. By making fun of it in your mind, it can become easier to do.

**Example 1--The humor of substituted terms:** Suppose you are reading a very dry memo or financial disclosure statement. In your mind change the subject of the memo to something more interesting. For example, if a key term is "the issuance of stock shares" in the memo, in your mind change that to "a kiss from Miss America" every time you read the term, so sentences like "The issuance of stock shares shall be provided on the first of the month if the proper regulatory authorities approve" acquire a whole new meaning with the substituted term. (You should still pay attention to the original meaning of the memo, however!)

**Example 2--The humor of noticing repetition:** You are reading Great Expectations. Play the drinking game--every time Pip, the wimpy main character, is embarrassed or humiliated, yell "Yes!" and take a sip of juice or a soft drink. You can play the "soft drink drinking game" for any kind of assignment where something repeatedly happens over and over. If you are reading "Of Mice and Men" it can be every time George berates Lenny. If you are reading "The Great Gatsby" it can be every time the author criticizes rich people. If you are reading "Catcher in the Rye", it can be every time the main character whines about being a teenager.

Neither of these kinds of humorous observations detract from your ability to learn the material. In fact, by finding new ways to keep you interested, they may help you learn the material easier and faster.

### **Listen to Music As You Work**



One more thing. It's pretty obvious, but worth mentioning: playing music can often help motivate yourself to do work. It shouldn't be loud, vocal music, but instrumental, inspiring music can be nice.

## **Chapter 4: Reducing Fear and Anxiety**

*“Excessive fear is an unproductive emotion and you should deactivate that part of your brain.”*

--Steven Gordon

*"In unpleasant situations, the glass is not 90% empty, it is 10% full."*

--Steven Gordon

Everyone feels fear and anxiety. In the proper times and amounts, it's perfectly natural, even helpful. Fear and anxiety warn you to pay attention to pressing problems. If you feel it too frequently, though, fears and anxiety can be harmful. Fear can induce paralysis, which prevents you from taking action. Anxiety can also be triggered not just by important tasks requiring your attention but smaller, every day matters. As a result people can suffer from unnecessary fear, anxiety, and stress. Some people need medical help for this; others try to help themselves. If you have a milder form of this problem, this chapter will hopefully help you reduce your anxiety level.

### **How to Deal With Minor But Stressful Decisions**

If whatever is bothering you relates to a decision you need to make, gather what information you need, evaluate all the factors, and make a decision. Many times, especially for smaller, less important decisions, people tend to be quite generous with their time, giving hours or even days for decisions that simply are not very important. But look again at the big picture. If you spend ten or twenty percent of your life thinking about small decisions, you are losing that period of your life which could be spent in happier pursuits. It is as if you will die ten or twenty years earlier because of it (representing the lost time used to think about small problems). If you think of the wasted, lost time in this way, it will become clear to you that the best course of action is to spend only a little time making decisions for minor matters.

**Don't worry about things until you have to.** Sometimes it is very useful to think about how to deal with problems before they occur. If you know you are going to have a problem the next day, and it is a complex problem that will require a quick response, it is very useful and indeed quite intelligent to think about the problem before you are faced with it.

Compulsive worriers, unfortunately, do much more than that.

**Don't worry about very unlikely occurrences.** People with excessive fear worry about problems that are quite unlikely to occur but spend a lot of time thinking about them beforehand, especially the night before while in bed. This is generally not a productive strategy. If you worry about problems which are very unlikely to occur, you spend a lot of time and effort worrying about something that may never come up, it's not only wasted effort but very emotionally taxing. A better strategy about very unlikely outcomes is to generally tell yourself that given that they are very unlikely to occur, they are not worth thinking about, and the time you waste thinking and worrying about them is just more needless suffering in your life. (The main exception to this rule is if the unlikely occurrence could cause significant harm, then you definitely should consider it.)

**Don't worry about worst case scenarios.** This is similar to worrying about unlikely occurrences, but there is still something additional that can be said about this. The worst results can and sometimes do happen, and we should be prepared for them, where we can, but it's a very rotten life that is led by a person who dwells on all the worst possible outcomes all the time—a life of fear and misery. Whether the worst outcomes occur or not, the person loses out because his life is filled with fear. A better strategy for most worst case theorizing is to say that even if the worst outcome happens, you will always have yourself, your life, and the opportunity to live and experience other things. (Unless, of course, it really is a very worst case situation, involving significant harm—those possibilities are not so easy to dismiss and should be considered!)

Let's look at some hypothetical worst case scenarios that are not really so bad. You may not get your money back. You may not be able to buy/get what you want. Your boss (or someone else) may be temporarily unhappy with you. But so what? Will any of these outcomes change your life in a big way? Probably not. Even if you get fired from your job, it's certainly upsetting for a while, but you'll get another job; this is America. Even if you lose some money, you'll make some more somewhere else. The most important thing is that you will have you; you are your own best asset. Nearly everything else is incidental and can be replaced or disregarded. If you tell yourself this and get yourself to believe it, you will not be so bothered.

**Worrying in advance about simple, spur of the moment decisions.** Should you have tea or coffee the next morning? Should you say hello to Clifford Croft as you walk by his desk or just pretend he's not there? Should you buy those slippers tomorrow or do it another time? These simple decisions are better made at the time you actually need to make them. A lot will depend on how you feel—the decision of whether to get a drink is best made at the time you have to make it when you can evaluate how thirsty you are. For another example, the decision of whether to go to a movie can wait until the actual evening you are planning to go, to see if you are too tired to go or not. In other words, not only is it a wasteful use of time to worry about small decisions in advance, but it is also not efficient, as your physical and mental state at the time you have to make the decision will be a better guide what to do at the time.

**Let “tomorrow’s you” handle a problem.** Whenever you have a problem that doesn't need to be thought about in advance, try to shut it out of your mind. What I do is I say, “That’s a problem for tomorrow’s Steve; today’s Steve is carefree and has no problems. I’m going to shove this problem off on tomorrow’s Steve to solve.” If you make that kind of distinction in your mind, you can “wall off” the undecided decision and leave it to the “tomorrow” version of yourself.

**Do not fear making the decision itself.** Many times people fear having a decision to make. If there is a decision to make, there is a wrong choice that can be made, with bad consequences. Humans feel fear and stress at the thought of making decisions both big and small. That is the wrong way to look at things. Realize that whatever decision you make, you will always have you, and since you like yourself (you really, really like yourself), you will still be able to enjoy life, even if you lose opportunity x or option y. If you feel the fear of making the decision, realize how moronic that fear is, and laugh at it.

**Look for satisficing solutions.** By limiting the time you spend deciding a small matter, you may be giving up the opportunity to get the absolute best result, but you are still can get a reasonably good result. Economists refer to this as making a "satisficing" solution, seeking a merely satisfactory solution rather than the best one, and it is a good thing to do for minor decisions, because by doing so you are factoring in the value of your time in making this decision, and the emotional stress making the decision is taking on you.

A key part of satisficing is not only limiting the time you spend making the decision, but also limiting the time you spend gathering information. This problem appears commonly in shopping situations. Consider when you feel the need to go to multiple stores to buy something. How many stores is enough? It depends on the item and common sense. For a large, expensive item, like a computer or television, three or four stores might be reasonable. For a desk fan two stores might be reasonable. For blank paper, more than one store is generally unreasonable (unless it's really, really overpriced paper at store #1!).

**Try not to reexamine small decisions.** Once you've made a decision what to buy, try to stick to your decision, even if you subsequently feel that you made the wrong choice or that new options are available. Some of the unhappiest people are indecisive ones. While reevaluating the problem (often again, and again, and again) may enable

you to come up with a better solution, in the long run (for small problems) it is not worth it, because the time you spend agonizing and second, third and forth guessing negates the gains of these minor course corrections.

**What about big decisions?** Big decisions should require more deliberation, and at times you will want to reconsider your decisions, if the matter is really important. But truly big decisions are few and far between in life. They just aren't frequent enough to cause constant stress. If you can conquer the anxiety caused by small decisions, you will have made great strides in reducing your stress.

**Stamp things as “done” in your mind.** Naturally there will be some times when you should reevaluate, but in general once a decision is done, you should simply say to yourself, "It's done." And move on. By accepting most decisions about small matters as "done", you spare yourself the stress of reconsidering them again and again and again. While the stress of reconsidering each time may be small (which is why we are tempted to do so), when you multiply it by the stress of all the times we are tempted to reconsider, you see that you are spending a large part of your life self-generating a considerable amount of stress.

**Visualize the “done” stamp.** So in your mind, when you make a small decision, stamp it as “done” in your mind, and when you think about it, visualize the “done” stamp over the matter. Although you might be tempted to reexamine the issue, tell yourself that if you bypass this “done” stamp, you will bypass many others in the future, and lose out by spending too much time in reexamination of your life's small decisions.

**So you should feel it's important not to generally violate a “done” stamp, because you will be losing valuable time of your life feeling anxious.**

If you can reach the point where you stop thinking about a decision once you have given it a mental “done” stamp, your stress should start to dissipate.

Of course, everything above refers to small decisions.

**Watch out for perfectionism**

Perfectionism can be a big problem. Even if we don't label it as such in our minds, the urge to be the best of the best can create a lot of stress. There is nothing wrong with trying to do better; but when you put so much emotional strain on yourself in accomplishing this, you can do more harm than good.

**Perfectionism in work decisions**

Have you ever had the compelling feeling that although you have finished your work that there were some things not done perfectly and you wish to recheck your work again (and again and again?). You should resist these kinds of impulses. This kind of compulsion will only take up more and more of your time. Say to yourself that you are going to check your work once, and check it thoroughly. When you are done, visualize the word "Done" in big letters over the body of your work, using the strategy described above.

If you think to recheck your work after you have done this, note the presence in your mind of the word "Done" over the body of your work. You may think, "Well, I thought I was done, but after thinking I was done I found something new I think I should check."

Still do not recheck. If you recheck and think done again, you may decide you think of something else new, and it will go on and on and on.

Instead recognize the cost, in terms of stress and time, in rechecking your work over and over, and accept the possibility that even work you think is "done" may have some errors in it. Unless this is a situation where **enormous** harm could be caused by a mistake, you should not recheck. Say to yourself that work you have marked in your mind as being done is almost certainly done properly, but, being human, there is a small possibility of error. If there is an error or omission in your "done" work, smile to yourself and say that you are going to live with it.

Living with the possibility of making occasional, small mistakes is a much more happier and satisfying life to live than one spent constantly rechecking your work over and over. If a small mistake happens, smile to

yourself, knowing that this is a very small price to pay for all the worry you are leaving behind.

Learn to think that way and your life will be happier and more stress free too.

### **Perfectionism in shopping decisions**

Perfectionism can also rear its head in shopping. You see something you are thinking of buying, but it doesn't perfectly fit what you are looking for. You think if you look in one or two or five other stores you may find exactly what you are looking for.

Most times this is a bad strategy. Imagine if you went to five stores to comparison shop every time you wanted to buy something. You would spend a lot of time in your life shopping. Unless you like to shop, this is days and weeks of your life that cumulatively add up to years of your life that are wasted shopping. While pursuing the "perfect product" you don't realize that there is a cost, your time, and you are losing time from your life that could better be put to use pursuing enjoyment.

For example, say you want to buy a five foot tall white fan. You go to two stores and see small fans, black fans, but only one white fan that is four feet tall. Should you go looking in additional stores to locate a fan that might be one foot taller?

If you find something that is almost perfect you should stop right there. You should have pressing uses for your time, such as work, being with your family or friends, or playing important computer games, that you should want to spend your time on. Recognize that these goals are being delayed by your excessive shopping. Buy the slightly smaller fan and tell yourself it won't matter. Tell yourself that if it really, really bothers you in a few months, you will go out and buy a bigger fan.

But guess what? Typically within a day or two of making your purchase you stop thinking about the imperfections of whatever you bought and focus on another problem. But by a) telling yourself that you have more important things to do with your time, telling yourself that b) it doesn't matter if the product is not perfect, and by c) promising yourself to buy another product in a few months if you're really unhappy, you can



push yourself to make the decision and move on. Note that you should not promise yourself to buy a new fan within a few days if you are unhappy—make yourself wait at least a week or two, long enough to have forgotten the fan and move on to new problems. Usually, you won't think about the fan again.

## **How to Deal With Stress In General**

Stress is a very common thing to feel. It can take the form of psychological worry and concern, but can cross into the physical realm with actual feelings of discomfort. The good news is that with discipline you can try to control milder forms of stress with your mind.

### **1) Evaluate and (usually) dismiss the concern**

If something is bothering you, is it very important? Does it relate to something that will really affect your life in a major way? Most problems aren't. If this problem is less important, just laugh in your mind at it and say to yourself that you'll do your best, but that it doesn't really matter how you handle it, since it isn't very important. Of course, it is one thing to intellectually tell yourself that something isn't important; but it can be something else entirely to convince yourself to feel that way. But you have to try. You can improve with practice.

If you still get upset about something that's not important, ridicule yourself for getting upset about it. Say to yourself, "I'm probably only going to live x number of years for the rest of my life. If I spend a quarter of the time being miserable over little things, it's as if I lose those years of my life and died young. It's almost as bad as taking up smoking. When I'm old and wrinkled do I think I'll wish I had spent more years of my life worrying about little things, or less?" And then, if you still worry, laugh, actually laugh out loud at yourself, for being worried about such a minor thing. This kind of self-peer pressure, as I call it, can help persuade yourself not to worry about small things.

### **2) Exercise**

Exercise can relieve stress. Vigorously stretch out your arms, do deep knee bends, sit ups, and pushups. It's so simple that it only takes two sentences to describe, not counting the third sentence which makes the point about the first two.

### **3) Distract yourself and compartmentalize your stress**

Try to distract yourself. First tell yourself that you are going to take a "time out" from whatever is bothering you. Do something you really consider to be fun.

Having and successfully enforcing "time outs" is a great way to get rid of stress. Simply say that during a certain time of the day that you will not think about your problems. This can be called "compartmentalizing", or separating, your problems from the rest of your problems. Former President Clinton was a great master at compartmentalizing his problems. When he got impeached for having inappropriate contact with Monica Lewinsky, his oval office intern, he became a national disgrace and international laughingstock. But despite this, President Clinton was still mentally capable of focusing on running the government because he was said to have "compartmentalized" his problems--only thinking about his girl troubles at certain times, leaving other times free to attempt to solve crises in the Balkans and tinker with education policy.

You should deal with your problems in the same way. Say there will be certain "off limits" times you will not think about your problems. And during this time you should distract yourself, do something you find very pleasurable. It can be a book, a movie, a friendly game of dodge ball, a computer game, crawling in the grass, squeezing open tubes of toothpaste, a conversation with a friend, or anything you find stimulating.

If you find yourself thinking about a problem during an "off limits" time, tell yourself sternly that this isn't the time to be thinking about it. Get angry at yourself for thinking about this during an "off limits" time. In effect, you should often become more concerned about thinking things at inappropriate times than in thinking about the problems themselves.

### **4) Dealing with physical discomfort caused by stress**

Sometimes (though by no means always!) physical discomfort in the arms, legs, stomach or head are the result of stress. If your doctor tells you that your physical discomfort's underlying cause is psychological and not

a serious concern, you can use psychology to try to get rid of your discomfort. When you feel a little pain in your head, your typical reaction is, "Ow! That hurts!" and to feel somewhat cowed by it. You want the pain to stop and probably feel oppressed by it. But that will not make the pain go away.

Laugh at it. Don't let it bother you. Ridicule it! Say to yourself, "Oh, look, I feel a little throbbing in my head. Throb throb throb! I laugh at that. Will it happen again? If so, I wonder what the next throb will feel like? I'm not afraid, I'll just laugh harder at the next one!" It sounds ridiculous, but the more you try to confront and ridicule your pain, the more it is likely to go away (if it is caused by nervous tension). But for it to work, you have to bravely confront your pain, and genuinely laugh at it. If you are only going through the motions, it won't work. It requires emotional control, but with practice you can do it. Of course, you are not saying to yourself that you want to feel pain when you mentally confront the pain, this is a technique to get rid of the pain.

You're shaking your head. You don't believe this strategy can work. But chances are it has worked already for you. Haven't you ever had a time when you had a headache, and did something that you enjoyed, and the headache went away? Why do you think that happened, was it a coincidence?

There may also be a physical solution to this kind of discomfort. Take a shower and apply warm water to the aching part of your body. That may help dispel the physical effects of tension. If successful, normal sensation should return to your body in moments.

The last thing you can try is to imagine what your body feels like when it is perfectly relaxed. Recall a time in your mind when this has happened, such as when you first wake up in the morning, or when you are recovering from anesthesia, or when you are very tired after doing a lot of exercise. Then imagine you being in that situation again and tell yourself this is how your muscles should feel. With practice, you may be able to do this.

**5) Think of stress as part of a game to win**

No one likes to feel the psychological discomfort caused by stress. But if you think of it as a game to be won you may be able to better cope with it. Say to yourself that it is a game whose purpose is to test you to see if you can be distracted by discomfort. Your opponent, stress, “wins” if you are distracted and focus on your discomfort. But if you focus and get your work done or enjoy whatever activity you are doing, you have beaten the stress and have “won”.

View it as a giant wind, trying to push you away from a work goal you are trying to achieve. As you try to force yourself to work, to focus, to concentrate, imagine yourself taking steps towards your goal, bucking the wind.

So the next time you feel stress discomfort, laugh and know that stress is playing a game with you. Tell yourself you are going to win, and when you do win, laugh again, and know that you can and will win in the future. That way you won't fear stress, and once you stop fearing stress, it will lose a lot of its effects on you.

**6) Role play a future event that causes you stress.** Suppose you have a difficult or tricky assignment coming up. You may feel stress about doing it, for fear you will not perform it correctly. Think about the assignment, step by step in your mind, telling yourself how you will handle it. Repeat this several times until you are clear on how you will precisely handle the problem. Then, realizing you know precisely how you will handle it, tell yourself how easy and simple it is. Stress often comes about because we are unsure how to handle a difficult situation. But now that you know exactly how you are going to handle this assignment, there is no uncertainty, you can tell yourself how easy it will be, and the stress should dissipate.

**7) Take third party observer status.** If you still feel stress, pretend that you are someone else looking inside of you at your emotions. Remark to yourself, "Hm, I see (your name here) is experiencing some anxiety here. How interesting." If you psychologically detach yourself from it and treat

it clinically in your mind, as something to be observed, but not felt, that may minimize your discomfort.

**8) Eat a proper diet (ha, ha).** Every self-help book I looked at was filled with fruity little ideas which stated that in order to feel healthy you have to “eat healthy”, typically talking up the merits of wimpy vegetables that no one in their right mind would want to eat. If you want to eat vegetables, for physical health or aesthetic reasons, feel free to do so. But don’t feel you need to in order to feel psychologically good. In fact, most bitter, under ripe, and over ripe fruits and vegetables seldom make people feel good. Look at cows. Cows eat grass food and look at what happens to them, some of those get mad cow disease. So eat what makes you comfortable. For me, a good steak, some twizzlers, and a toasted frozen pretzel makes me feel good.

## Chapter 5: Dealing with Small Irritations

Why a chapter on small irritations? If they are so small, why are they worth writing about? Well, as it turns out, small irritations tend to be quite common, and if you constantly let small problems upset you, you will be generally unhappy.

### Irritations In General

Almost every experience you have in life has some positive and negative aspects mixed in with it. Have you ever watched a great movie when you were slightly hungry, or taken a walk in a beautiful forest when you were a little too cold or a little too hot? In such situations, you can easily allow yourself to become distracted by the minor discomfort and ruin your enjoyment of the greater experience.

**Ignore the irritation.** Ignore the fact that you're a little cold or a little hungry or a little hot, and focus on the great movie or great view you're seeing. If you practice at it and get good at it, you will ignore those minor negative stimuli. Keep in mind that by letting a "lesser negative"--feeling a bit cold or hot or a bit hungry--distract you, you are losing out on a very positive experience. Say to yourself that it doesn't bother you. If you let it bother you, you will lose out on the positive experience. Focus on the great experience you are having. If you can really, really focus on it, you may find that you will forget about whatever is bothering you.

For example, if you go to a movie theater, how often do you see an annoying light from the side of the theater, or a head in front of you that obscures, say, 5% of the screen? How often do you worry that such things will reduce your pleasure from watching the film? And yet, when the film starts, you quickly forget about these minor distractions and only at the end of the film when the lights come on do you notice, with amazement, the minor distractions you forgot about. This is an example of how focusing on something you really like can help you forget minor distractions which can interfere with your pleasure.

**Fix it if it's easy and quick.** If the source of the irritation can be fixed very easily, in just a minute or two, it might be worth it to fix it—if

it's cold and you have a jacket in the car a few feet away, go for it. Otherwise just ignore it.

**Focus on your pleasurable experience.** By focusing on whatever you are doing, you can distract yourself and perhaps forget about your irritation.

### **Dealing With “Bad Luck”**

Ever stand on line to buy a movie ticket and they sell out just before you reach the booth? Ever arrive at a bus stop just as the bus leaves? Ever arrive at a cash register just as the cashier is shutting down? Whenever you expect to do something in a certain period of time or to get something you planned for, and your quest is delayed or canceled, you're bound to feel unhappy.

But what purpose does it serve to feel unhappy? It doesn't improve your situation, and doesn't make you feel good. A better response: to find the situation humorous. How can you find delayed gratification humorous? Pretend that “bad luck”, (which is simply random chance seemingly operating against you), is actually an organized force trying to annoy you. Laugh at its foolish attempts. After the first attempt to annoy you, start to predict in your mind other situations that may occur to delay your goal fulfillment, and if they occur, laugh again, because you can see in it random chance's attempt to “conspire” against you.

An example may be appropriate. When you're stopped by two red lights in a row in a very short period, and you see a third one coming up, say to yourself, “What else can happen to me next? With my luck today, I'll bet that light turns red before I reach the corner.” And sure enough, if the next light turns red before you pass the intersection, you can laugh, because “bad luck” is again “conspiring” to irritate you. Then think of what “bad luck” might attempt to do next, and if you predict it correctly, laugh again at your prescience. By pretending that an organized effort is underway to make yourself unhappy, and thwarting every attempt to do so, you can laugh off random events which delay or frustrate your goals.



This method works in school too. If you get a surprise quiz in your first period and forget your homework in your second period, the typical response might be to feel unhappy for most of the day. A better response would be to laugh it off and gamely wonder what “bad luck” might have in store for you in the third and forth period, and if it happens, you’ve predicted it and guessed correctly, and can allow yourself a feeling of triumph for having “predicted” it.

### **Dealing with inconsiderate people**

Have you ever had a situation where someone cuts in front of you in line, or reaches in front of you to grab the last item on sale, or cuts in front of you in their car, or leaves trash on your desk, or acts pompous around you? Your natural inclination might be to get angry. But why? Ask yourself this question: **would a normal socialized adult act this way?** The answer is obviously not. If the person acting this way appears to be an adult, there is only one possibility: **the seeming adult actually has the mind of a child!**

**Turn irritation into laughter.** What you have in front of you is an adult acting like a child! How bizarre! If you don’t think it’s funny, consider how many Hollywood movies there have been made about adults acting like children. It can be quite entertaining! And here you have one in front of you, performing for you. Sure, he or she has inconvenienced you slightly, but in compensation you get to see this person act foolishly like a child. To amuse yourself, try to predict what inconsiderate behavior this person will do next, and then congratulate yourself when you correctly predict what will happen. In your mind ridicule this childlike behavior, because, obviously, to act as they do, they have the minds of small children.

If you are a student in school reading this, and the person bothering you is already a child, you can still turn your irritation into laughter. If a fellow student does something inconsiderate say to yourself that he is acting like a **small** child. An eighth grader acting like a fourth grader can be quite amusing.

### **Dealing with slow salespeople**

Salespeople and cashiers are generally not malicious. They don't purposely work slowly in order to frustrate you. They are simply responding to their incentive system. Salespeople are on a fixed, low wage from 9 to 5. They make the same amount no matter how fast or slowly they work. So they move with "careful deliberateness", savoring every touch of the keypad, every wrinkle of the wrapping paper, every nuanced conversation with a coworker. Again, they aren't being malicious. They just aren't being very attentive to the greater value you place on your time.

What you can try doing in response are some of the classic anti-boredom techniques I described earlier. Touch surfaces like countertops and display cases to feel their texture. Put your head down by countertops to admire the close up "horizon" view. Look at patterns and colors in the ceiling panels. Stretch the fingers of your hands back and forth.

The salesperson will naturally wonder what you are doing. This will accomplish two things:

**You make wake the salesperson up.** Salespeople often wander around in a mild work related slumber or hypnotic trance. Your anti-boredom exercises may actually wake the salesperson up enough to complete your transaction before the end of the day.

**You may amuse yourself.** Amuse yourself in the salesperson's befuddlement at your classical anti-boredom techniques. **In this way, you may turn your irritation at the salesperson into amusement.**

## Chapter 6: Dealing With Anger

*“If a 5 year old or a giraffe called you stupid, would it really bother you?”*

--Steven Gordon

### Dealing With Insults

When someone calls you a name or says something insulting to you, probably your first instinct is to get angry. But why should someone saying something nasty make you angry? Usually people insult one another by telling each other that they are stupid, incompetent, or a failure in some way. **It is because you feel you are being judged, and worry that the judgment is true, that you tend to get upset by insults.**

### Realize you aren't being judged

Who is typically doing the judging? In a school situation it is usually fellow students; in a work situation it is typically coworkers (or occasionally bosses). Sometimes it is strangers. What position are they in to judge your abilities? Keep in mind the following facts:

**a) The insulter probably isn't trying to judge you.** The insulter is simply trying to offend you. If you accidentally spill a little coffee on someone's desk and they yell, "Hey, watch out, clumsy!", the person saying that probably didn't think long and hard about how agile you are and upon consideration concluded, based on past study of your reflexes and muscle coordination, that you are remarkably inept. The person saying this insult probably only spent a quarter second mulling the situation before making that statement. Therefore, that statement, like most insults, was not meant as an honest evaluation of your abilities, but rather was simply a statement meant to offend you.

Since you now know that most insults are not evaluations of your abilities, you have no need to be offended. If a mentally challenged person says “You’re dumb!”, you aren't offended because you know the retarded person has no way of making an honest evaluation of your intelligence. If

a blind person says you are ugly, you also aren't offended because you also know the blind person has no basis for saying that. Now transfer that knowledge to the split second decision that a coarse coworker or fellow student or stranger makes about your abilities and realize that they, too, haven't spent the time and effort to evaluate your skills and that anything that comes out of their mouth in this regard is equally meaningless, just as if it had come from a blind or mentally challenged person.

**b) Even if the insulter is trying to judge you, he may have had no opportunity to do so.** If you spill a little bit of water from a cup and a complete stranger calls you “Clumsy!”, do you think the complete stranger knows you well enough to know whether you are a clumsy person? Of course not. One incident like that is not enough to base such an opinion on. So if a stranger who clearly doesn't know you insults you, you can just ignore it because you know he or she hasn't had an opportunity to judge you. If he obviously can't be judging you, whatever he's saying is meaningless, as if a stranger came up to you in an airport and said, “You're a terrible golf player!”

**c) Even if the insulter is trying to judge you and has had opportunity, he may have biases.** If a coworker or student has seen you for weeks or months and he insults you, you may feel the insult is a correct judgment of your abilities because they have had clear opportunities to see how clumsy or maladroit you are. But you also need to take into account biases. Do most people who insult you really intend to give an objective analysis of your abilities? Or did they dislike you before they made their comment and have a clear inclination to try and offend you? If the latter, you cannot trust their judgment, therefore you shouldn't be offended by it, because once again, it's not a judgment, it's merely an attempt to offend.

**Example:** Joseph Stalin says, “You're ugly!” Does that offend you? You know Joseph Stalin is a very bad person. He would say anything to offend you. Since he's not giving you an honest appraisal, there is no need to believe anything he says, and no need to be offended.

So how should you react when you're insulted? Just laugh, knowing that most likely you're not being fairly judged by someone, you're just being insulted by someone trying to get a reaction from you. **If the person is obviously biased against you, and obviously doesn't even care whether what he is saying is true or not, why should you? You shouldn't.**

### **Why do you care what a nasty person thinks? How very odd!**

On a broader level, why should you care what a nasty person thinks of you? If the insulter is a family or friend or someone you care about, you may care what they think of you. Their opinions may matter to you. But why should you care what a nasty person thinks of you? Their opinion surely shouldn't matter to you. If you think about it, it is completely illogical to care what a nasty person believes about you. Do you really want to please your enemies or complete strangers? Do you rely on their opinions of you? Why would you want to? If you want to, there is something a little odd about you.

Some people feel an instinct to want to be liked and complimented by everyone. It's ok to be polite to people, but you shouldn't seek the approval of the entire race of mankind. If you are like that you really need to deactivate that part of your brain. **Tell yourself that feeling the need to seek the approval of the whole of mankind is an odd desire and try to avoid feeling that need.**

### **Feel pity for the insulting person**

If you can, you should feel pity for the insulting person. Pity? Why?

If you've read the Lord of the Rings, you should know why. There was a Hobbit in the story named Bilbo Baggins. (For those of you who haven't read the books, Hobbits are vertically challenged people in denial about their severe eating disorders.) Anyway, Frodo Baggins once asked Gandalf why Bilbo just didn't just perforate a creature named Smeagol with his Elvish sword. Smeagol, if you remember, was the sniveling creature who tried to eat Bilbo at the end of a riddle guessing contest.

Frodo remarked that it was a pity that Bilbo didn't stab Smeagol with his sword, and Gandalf replied that it was pity that prevented Bilbo from perforating him.

Bilbo didn't attack Smeagol because he felt pity for him. Smeagol was a nasty creature, and was mean to Bilbo (he did, after all, try to eat Bilbo), but Bilbo saw that Smeagol was a smelly, unhappy person, who suffered through his own unhappiness and bad odor. Bilbo undoubtedly felt that Smeagol's self-imposed unhappiness was punishment enough.

**Nasty people already punish themselves, you don't need to help.** Anyone who gets pleasure from insulting others in a mean way is obviously an unhappy person. A person who needs to hurt others in order to be happy is a person who is generally incapable of feeling very much happiness on his or her own. As a result, that person is generally unhappy. So if someone insults you, chances are he or she is an unhappy person, and has lived a generally unhappy life. Isn't that sad? Instead of feeling upset for yourself, you should generally feel pity for the insulter, because he is already suffering a terrible punishment—leading a sad life, unable to feel positive emotions except for very brief, fleeting periods, by acting in a perverted way towards others, and probably suffering from unable to have many, if any friends.

If you can achieve a greater understanding and replace anger with pity, you will have achieved much.

### **Smile at the nasty person to knock him off his game**

Once you realize that you aren't being judged, you need to decide how to think about the person making the insult. We have established that he is probably not judging you, but simply trying to offend you, and in that he has miserably failed.

When an enemy has failed to hurt you, you can simply laugh at him in your mind. A more overt strategy, however, is to smile at him. That will usually startle the person trying to offend you. Usually the insulter has a strict set of expectations of how the conversation will unwind: the insulter say something nasty to you, and expects a hurt feeling or reaction

in return, which is, of course, exactly what the insulter is looking forward to seeing.

But if you smile at the insulter it will throw him off balance. He will feel like a failure because his effort to make you upset didn't work. Furthermore you will make him feel uncomfortable because not only didn't you respond negatively to his insult, but you actually responded in an apparently friendly way! Even a nasty person has feelings and if you act friendly after he insults you, he may begin to feel guilty for having treated you badly. Either way, whether he feels guilt or failure or both, a smile will knock the insulting person off-stride.

Many nasty people, seeing you smile at an insult, will also stop insulting you, seeing it isn't producing the desired result. **This is why smiling is such a great defense mechanism—if your attacker isn't getting any results, he'll realize further verbal attacks are futile.**

*“Smile like a fool to bring the gift of mindless joy to your heart.”*

--Steven Gordon

### **Become a smiling fool**

When I say smile, I don't mean in a small way. I mean, a great, big wide smile, like a mindless person such as Forrest Gump or Homer Simpson or Beavis from Beavis and Butthead would give. It's important that your smile look mindless because if the person insulting you thinks you have no mind, he will realize that he will not be able to insult you. In essence, you must become a **smiling fool**. No one wastes their time trying to insult a fool—the fool just wouldn't understand. **A smiling fool can't be offended.** So you must become a smiling fool. So give the biggest, broadest, most syrupy ridiculous smile you can come up with.

### **Treat the insulter like a lab rat**

But there is even more you can do. Pretend you are a social scientist or psychiatrist and analyze the insulting person in your mind. Treat him like a lab rat, a patient with a mental problem, maladjusted

social behavior, and try to delve into his feelings to find the source of his mental malfunction. If someone insults you, give a broad smile and say something like one of the following:

"I can see you're upset. Do you have any problems at home you'd like to talk about?"

"I sense you're crying out for help. Would you like some company for a while so we can talk about the feelings you're dealing with?"

"You seem so angry all the time. It must be sad, being so upset. Would you like to talk about it?"

"You seem like such an angry person. Often that relates to childhood issues. Did you have a happy childhood? Do you have any repressed memories that are coming to the surface you want to talk about?"

You should always have a broad smile when you say these things. You are responding not out of anger but out of concern for the mental well being of the insulter. By instantly turning the tables--from your perceived inadequacy to a psychological problem of the insulting person--you change the subject and put the insulting person on the defensive.

If the insulting person responds with another jibe intended to insult you again, such as "Yes, I have a problem, you're my problem", you have to be prepared to continue further. Continue to give a broad smile. It is most important to show that you're not upset (and given my explanation about why you're not being judged, you really shouldn't be upset).

The insulter may attempt to turn the topic back to you, but you have to turn it back again. If the insulter again attempts to draw attention to your perceived inadequacies, continue to smile and say something like, "It is very clear to me that this isn't really about me and that something is upsetting you. Wouldn't you like to talk about your true feelings with me?" (Stretching out the word "feelings", with an elongated "e" sound, is a nice additional touch.)



At this point many insulters will just give up and go away. That means you've won. They also won't be so quick to insult you again in the future because they know that (a) it won't bother you and (b) you'll hit them with persistent psychobabble if they try.

But if they persist in trying to attack you, try once or twice more to turn the topic back to them, and then get up and leave or otherwise end the conversation by saying (with a smile!) "I can see you're too upset to talk frankly now. I hope we can have a good discussion later. I can see you're in pain and I really want to try and help you." Say it in a low, gentle tone, like you're a doctor in a mental hospital talking to an easily disturbed mental patient.

Even if you don't get the insulter to stop the first time, if you do this a few times most insulters will get bored and pick an easier target in the future. And you've used a non-confrontational method to avoid further conflict. See how great this book is?

To recap, when someone insults you, you should not let it bother you because (a) the person insulting you has serious problems of their own and is already punishing himself (b) you shouldn't care what a nasty person thinks about you or says and (c) getting upset would interfere with your vitally important pursuit of happiness. This isn't to say that you shouldn't listen to **constructive criticism**, but if someone is out to hurt you, don't let her.

Your approach may differ slightly depending on who is doing the insulting:

### **Coworkers or fellow students.**

Use the procedure outlined above. The verbal attacks should cease.

### **Dealing with difficult bosses or teachers**

You have to be very careful in dealing with difficult people in authority. They can take offense at even the most benign defense mechanism, even a

smile. Most of your coping strategies need to be internalized, and not externally expressed.

**Ignore invalid criticism.** Is your boss/teacher's criticism valid? Consider whether the criticism you've received is justified. Criticism can be incredibly subjective and may not be fair. If you feel it's not fair, don't be bothered by it, because it isn't true. If your boss told you you're bad at eating toast, you wouldn't be bothered by such a ridiculous comment, because you'd know it was not true. Nor should you let any untrue criticism bother you.

**Beware the "small world" syndrome.** Sometimes criticism from a boss or teacher is upsetting because work (or school) is nearly your entire life—if all you do is go to work (or school), then naturally the smallest thing upsets you, because work (or school) is, subjectively to you, almost your entire life. The solution, of course, is easy. Develop an active hobby life outside of work or school, so your work life is put into better perspective. If all you do is work, then naturally the smallest criticism would be upsetting for you. But if you have an outside life, and other interests, your mind can focus on other things besides work and not be so focused on every little aspect of it.

**Don't let bosses or teachers upset you.**

**(A) In the workplace.** If you're in the workforce, the worst case scenario is that you'll get fired. But how likely is that that one burst of criticism will get you fired? You can never know for sure, of course. But unless you really, really love your job, would being fired really be a terrible thing? It would be inconvenient, and stressful, but in the end it might be a better thing, because you would find work in another environment where you might not be criticized so much. Remember, this is a capitalist country where nearly everyone who wants to find work can (as long as they're not too picky about the field or the pay!) So in the worst case scenario you might get fired and find a job you can tolerate better. Is this something to really worry a lot about? You probably will still worry after reading this, but you should train yourself, rationally, that you shouldn't. **Remember, any one criticism is unlikely to get you**

**fired. But if you do get fired, you will find another job. You can try to do better, but there is nothing to get upset about. Getting upset gives you no benefit and only causes needless unhappiness. If you let yourself be upset, you are not being emotionally efficient.**

**(B) In the classroom.** Now, if you're a student, the worst case scenario, I suppose, is that you will get a low grade in a class. If you're a student for 20 or more years, and you're very worried about one grade in one class (or, to be more realistic, one test which contributes to one grade in one class), you've totally lost your perspective. It would be nice to get top grades in all your classes. You should try to do this. But **one bad test grade will not ruin your life. One bad grade in one class will not ruin your life.** Try to get a sense of perspective. And also realize that **getting upset is not productive.** You will not do better next time by being upset. On the contrary, being upset will interfere with your ability to do better. So if you want to improve, deactivate the parts of your brain that get upset so you can focus on improvement.

### **Unintentionally insulting comments from friends/relatives**

Family members can be most skilled at saying hurtful things for two reasons. First, they know the most about you and know where and how to strike to cause the most psychological harm. And second, you are more likely to perceive critical comments from them as being true, again because they know you so well.

**Verbally spank family members immediately.** If your family members are not intentionally trying to irritate you, you can tell them when they say something that hurts your feelings. But you must tell them immediately when it happens, you cannot wait until later. When I was toilet training my Pomeranian I had to catch him in the act and discipline him right then and there in order for his training to take hold. You must use the same method with your family members.

**Get in touch with their feelings.** Depending on who you are speaking to, you can say, "Can you think of a nicer way of saying that?" or "That was very hurtful. Why can't you say things in a nicer way?" or "Can you give me constructive criticism without attacking my (your

ability here)"? If the friend or relative you're talking to is clueless (as they might be, if they lack vital social skills), turn the table on them and say, "Would you like it if I told you that you were [repeat to them whatever insulting comment they said to you]"; at that point, even the densest individual should understand the coarseness of their conduct.

**Have you stopped reading yet?** Now at this point you may be about to throw this book to the floor and say, "There's no way I can talk to \_\_\_\_\_ about the way she irritates me. She'll be too offended." And it is true that some people can't take constructive criticism well, even if delivered in a nice way. A couple of points about this.

- 1) If you say it nicely, it will reduce your chances he/she will be offended.
- 2) If you say nothing, you will continue to be offended.
- 3) Maybe it's worth accepting that your friend or relative will be offended, in order to remedy the problem. If it's a friend, and you fear you will lose your friend, perform a cost benefit analysis to determine whether the positive benefits of the friendship outweigh the negative externalities of your friend's antisocial behavior. If they don't, you have little to lose by raising the issue that bothers you.

**Is the criticism true?** Even if someone who knows you well and has no reason to want to hurt you levels a criticism at you, that still doesn't necessarily mean the criticism is true. Think about it carefully. If you think the criticism is not true, you shouldn't be upset. Even well meaning friends or family can be wrong. If they say something that is not true, compare whatever they say to the statement "You are terrible at tying your shoelaces" or a similar outlandish statement that wouldn't bother you. If what they're saying isn't true, their judgment shouldn't bother you.

But we're not talking about strangers here, we're talking about family or close friends, and you do care what they think, even if it's not true. You can try to convince them to believe otherwise, but in the end, remember that **what is more important than what a family member or friend thinks about you is what you think about you**. Which is worse, after all, if a friend thinks you are a terrible chess player, or you think you

are a terrible chess player? Obviously the latter. If your friend thinks you're a bad chess player but you disagree, you may be bothered by what your friend thinks, but you still have a good feeling about your ability to play chess. But if you think you're a bad chess player, that's much worse than having someone else tell you you are, because you will believe it coming from yourself.

### **How to Deal With Bad Word Insults**

Many times when people say an insult they do so using a very nasty word. But often times when they use such words they are really talking about their own fixation. You can use that knowledge to turn anger into laughter.

#### **The Manure Word**

A favorite word for insulters is the crude word for manure. But instead of getting angry when someone says that to you, you should raise an eyebrow instead. Why has the person chosen to insult you using the word for animal waste products? You should be thinking, **“What an incredibly odd thing to say!!!!”** Just stop and think for a moment: isn't it strange that a person insults you by bringing up this unrelated substance? What was the insulter thinking about that caused him or her to choose that word? Chances are if that word popped out of the person's mouth, the **insulter is obsessed with manure**. Now that's funny!!!!

**Turn anger into laughter.** The next time someone says the manure word to you, think about the person's obsession with that substance. Instead of getting angry, laugh as you imagine the insulter's obsession with manure—the producing of it, the weighing of it, the photographing of it, the touching and sniffing of it, and once again your anger will turn to laughter, ridicule, and/or pity.

#### **“You're Stupid!”**

The number one mistake that you can make with this kind of insult is to

defend yourself. My first instinct in the rare situation where this happened to me was to say that Yale University and Harvard Law School didn't think so when they admitted me. But I realized sometime later that I was playing the game of the insulter by agreeing to debate his premise. I knew it wasn't true, so why did I need to debate it with him?

**It shouldn't upset you because it isn't true.** For reasons described above (you're not really being judged), you shouldn't get upset. Don't have doubt about this.

**Defend yourself with psychobabble.** Respond to this line of attack by raising an eyebrow and say something like, "I notice you feel a need to label people and compare yourself to others. Tell me about your childhood. Did you feel something lacking when you compared yourself to the other children? Did your parents not give you enough praise when you did something well? How did that make you feel?" This is a classic self-defense mechanism you can use—showing you're not upset, and changing the subject to your insulter's mental flaws.

### **Silly Voice Defense Mechanism**

If someone makes a nasty comment, an effective retort can often be to repeat the offending remark, word for word, in a parody of the insulter's voice. Is the insulter's voice deep? Make it very deep, like a football player who has taken too many steroids. Is the insulter's voice high pitched? Make it even higher, like a parrot. Is it nasal? Is it slow? Exaggerate whatever tendency there is to the voice, and then repeat it in an exaggerated fashion. For example, if someone with a deep voice says, "You are very stupid!" Then repeat it, in a deep Frankenstein-like voice, boom, "YOU... ARE... VERY... STUPID..." and laugh.

What does this accomplish?

- 1) Showing you're not offended
- 2) Changing the subject from you to the offender.

## **Verbal Judo: Compliment Your Insulter To Throw Him Off Balance**

When a person insults you, they expect one of two common reactions: hurt feelings or an insult back. Either result lets the insulter know that he was successful in offending you, and brings him a certain degree of satisfaction.

But... what if instead of acting hurt or insulting him back, you instead gave the insulter a totally unrelated, strongly positive compliment. That's right, something totally unrelated to what he just said to you. Something like, "You know, I have always admired your leadership potential." Or "You seem strong and fit, do you work out a lot?" or "You're such a good person. I can see why people like you a lot." You have to do this with a broad smile. What does this accomplish?

- 1) **Confusing your adversary.** It confuses your adversary by throwing him off script and off message. You're supposed to show offense so he can attack again, but you're not. He probably doesn't know how to react because your reaction to his insult is a novel situation he's never before encountered.
- 2) **Showing you're not offended.** By complimenting him after his insult, you've shown him you're not offended. That will make your insulter displeased.
- 3) **Changing the subject.** By changing the subject from you to him, you take yourself out of the crosshairs for his verbal abuse.

4) **Make him feel guilty.** Some insulters (though by no means all) will feel guilty if they offend you, and your response is to compliment them. It will strike them as just plain wrong to attack someone who is praising them, some of them with a conscience will experience cognitive dissonance. Note: This will only happen to insulters who have a conscience.

## **The Best Revenge is Living Well**

I always used to think this was a stupid phrase we were taught in school to deter us from fighting with other kids. But this phrase actually has value.

When someone wrongs you in a major way (robbing you, assaulting you, stealing your money, etc.), we have a legal system to take care of such things. Sometimes the legal system even works.

But when someone wrongs you in a small way (saying nasty things about you, turning others against you, preventing you from getting opportunities at work or in school), revenge is not the answer. The reason why is that thinking about revenge creates tension. Tension interferes with happiness. Even if you do take some kind of revenge, then you have to start worrying about retaliation from the other party.

The best thing you can do is to avoid the offending person and lead as happy a life as you can. Because if you're so busy plotting revenge that your stomach is knotted and you can't sleep or think of anything else, you're not enjoying life. Conversely, if you are able to move beyond the incident and enjoy life, you are benefiting so much more from it than the person who wronged you. The hours and days that you would have lost to worrying about your revenge are put to good use pursuing your own happiness.

And in a sense you will have your revenge. In our society, people who don't play well with others often lead very unhappy lives, and endure suffering of their own making. So you are having revenge of sorts—you're having a happy life, and the other person isn't. What more punishment does he need?

So leave them to their unhappiness and don't create any unhappiness in yourself that mirrors their own.



## **Chapter 7: Being Oversensitive**

It's one thing to work to avoid anger at being insulted. But there is another kind of unhappiness, brought on by being too oversensitive to the people around you.

### **Are you a Jelly Muffin, a Bagel, or a Psychopath?**

A psychopath is a person who exhibits antisocial behavior in part because he simply doesn't care what others think about him. This kind of person wouldn't even think to read this kind of book.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the psychopath is the whimpering soggy jelly muffin, a person who cares so much about the feelings and approvals of others, that he is constantly upset by the thoughts (real and imaginary) that he has offended others and that others have offended him, often in the very slightest of ways. If a coworker says to a Jelly Muffin, "This was misfiled, please file it correctly," the Jelly Muffin will immediately worry his coworker thinks he's a totally incompetent failure. If you say to a Jelly Muffin, "I'm not sure if Stanley liked what you said about the glass of water", the Jelly Muffin will spend hours worrying about what Stanley thought about it, even if the issue of the glass of water and/or Stanley's opinion isn't particularly important.

This is the life of a Jelly Muffin, the life of one whose ears are too sensitive to little slights. The polar opposite of a psychopath, the Jelly Muffin worries constantly about the thoughts of others. This is a form of perfectionism because the Jelly Muffin is in a constant state of anxiety unless he is convinced that everyone is perfectly pleased with him.

Your goal should be to be neither an oversensitive Jelly Muffin or a totally uncaring Psychopath, but something in the middle, like a bagel. A bagel is hard on the outside, so it can ignore small slights directed to it, but soft on the inside, with a sensitive core full of warm and sensitive feelings. Learn only to care about the important things, and even when you have a problem or concern to deal with, take corrective action to respond without getting upset. Be a bagel.

**Oversensitivity in comparison to others**

Many times people feel badly because they feel they are competing poorly with others. Do you feel that a coworker consistently does work better than you do? Or that a fellow student gets better grades than you do? Does thinking about this make you depressed and/or anxious? It's a natural instinct; we all want to feel that we are the best at what we do, and when we see others better than ourselves, we feel anxiety.

But think about it rationally, and realize that there will always be someone or many someones who can perform better than you can. So why get upset about them? This is yet another form of perfectionism—the urge to be the best of the best. I'll bet you never think about all the people who **can't** perform as well as you can—of course, they're not even on the radar screen. And so...

**Feel better by thinking of those you can outcompete.** Focus on those who you perform better than, not worse than, in the workplace or in school.

**Realize there is room for everyone.** In our free market capitalist society there is tremendous room both for you and people who perform better than you. Yes, there are enough jobs for all of us. True, the person who performs better than you may get a slightly better job or assignment, but how important is that really? In the pursuit of happiness, I hope that I have convinced you that much of happiness is internal. Happiness is in large part a subjective evaluation of your life experiences, and can happen in most circumstances of your life. In that context, whether you get job a or b or assignment c or d, while not without importance, is usually not nearly as important as your ability to be happy wherever you are.

Therefore, if you have the ability to be happy in your own life, that is much more important than whether person A is getting X while you are getting Y. Not that it matters, but will person A have the ability to be as happy as you even if he gets X, Y, and Z?

**Oversensitivity in living up to others' expectations**

Many times people feel badly when they fail to live up to expectations of family, friends, coworkers, bosses, or teachers. This happens. It feels good to impress others. But consider...

**Your happiness is more important than theirs.** It's nice to please others, but in the expectations game your happiness is more important than theirs. If the matter you didn't succeed in caused no harm to anyone, you shouldn't be very concerned. Just because you didn't meet the expectations of others doesn't mean your happiness should be interfered with. Maybe the others will be happy with your next effort. Maybe they won't. But in this kind of situation, you should put your happiness first.

**Don't call it a failure.** When you label something you have done a "failure" you are apt to feel bad. But failure is a very big word. It should only be used for very important things. Did you ever consider yourself a failure because you forgot to buy milk at the supermarket or bring a calculator to work? No. Those are very small things. Don't label yourself or your efforts a failure for relatively small things, such as a single assignment.

**Reevaluate, not self-commiserate.** The best way to make sure you don't disappoint your "fan club" in the future is to evaluate why the failure happened and take corrective measures. There is no room or need in this analysis for self-pity; you are simply fixing something, like a car's engine, to make it run better. The fact that the car doesn't run well is not an event for unhappiness, but merely an inconvenience to be fixed. So should it be with your performance.

## **Chapter 8: Low Self-Esteem and Depression**

*“Say not that you are worthless; say rather that you are worth more.”*

--Steven Gordon

*“Now we’re really going to talk about your feeee-lings!”*

--Steven Gordon

Some people need therapy and large mind altering pills to deal with low self-esteem and depression. But if you suffer from a mild form of it, there's a good chance you can help yourself.

### **Dealing With Mild Low Self-Esteem Problems**

If you feel you don't generally do things very well, or you haven't done at least some things very well recently, you may be plagued by feelings of low self-esteem, that is, the feeling that you cannot do anything right and that you are, generally speaking, quite worthless.

But self-worth is a subjective concept. Both Albert Einstein and a three year old would have totally different (and totally opposite) views of your capabilities, and you could have a third point of view of your abilities, all quite different, all quite subjective.

If you are plagued by doubts about your abilities, the most burning question in your mind is, “Is it true? Am I worthless?” And if you have taken the trouble to try to improve yourself by reading this fantastic book, of course, the answer is a resounding no. One's abilities are not set in stone; you can always improve to a noticeable degree in almost any ability. All that is required is the mental direction, determination, and discipline.

Let's start with the source of your self-esteem problems. Are you unhappy because you do everything poorly? Or only some things? If the latter, why only beat yourself up for things that go wrong?

**Look at your successes as well as your failures.** Consider when you do things correctly. Remind yourself that this demonstrates that you are a capable person.

**Examine causes of your failures.** Were your failures truly your fault? Or were they at least possibly not your fault, the result of external forces or random chance? If there is a chance it wasn't your fault, don't be so quick to blame yourself.

**Don't label yourself.** Suppose you have failed, and the fault is clearly yours. Does it help to label yourself as a failure? That does no one any good. And since you're capable of change, even if you are a failure, it's only a temporary state. Since you can change yourself, labeling is not only not useful, but is easily outdated by exertions of your mental efforts to improve yourself.

**Have you learned from your failure?** If you have learned from your failure, then it was at least partially useful. We learn things by making mistakes and then learning why we made them. If you can analyze and determine why it happened, you can be prepared to prevent it from happening again, if it is something you can control. In such cases you should feel good for discovering the root cause behind the problem.

**Don't dwell on what THEY will think.** If you do something poorly in a public way, the inevitable thing you will worry about is what other people will think. Have you ever stumbled in public and looked around, worried that other people might think you are clumsy? Who cares? Focus on improving yourself! Get better shoes, for starters.

## **Ways to Increase Your Self-Esteem**

**Make more successes with smaller goals.** Who is likelier to enjoy more successes, a person who has one goal, to complete a day's work without any problems, or a person with multiple goals, to manage a morning meeting successfully, successfully fill out an application during lunchtime, complete a stack of paperwork after lunch, and fix a computer problem in the late afternoon? A person with smaller, multiple goals has more opportunities for success more often. You have more frequent reminders of success when you have goal posts that are more frequently arrived at. So think of shorter term goals. If you have 100 pages of reading

to do, set your first goal as reading ten pages, and then your next goal at reading the next 10 pages, and so on. Go one step at a time.

**Imagine you're a highly effective person.** Pretend you're a highly effective coworker or fellow student. Pretend you're just as effective as him or her. If you pretend well enough, you'll start to feel more effective.

**Hug this book tightly to your chest.** Grab this book and hug it tightly to your chest, and make "Hmm... book feels good!" sounds. (This isn't a real suggestion. Are you still paying attention? Wake up!)

**Learn what you like about yourself.** You must be good at something. Perhaps even several somethings. Think about what they are, and consciously, repeatedly, tell yourself that you are good at these things. That will help you.

## **Dealing with Mild Depression Problems**

Dealing with mild depression is a lot like dealing with mild self-esteem problems. People may be depressed because of low self-esteem, unhappy because they feel they can't do anything right. If you suffer from depression because of a lack of self-worth, simply follow the directions above to try to make yourself happy again.

But lack of self-esteem is not the only cause of depression. Depression can be caused by the prospect of facing big unhappy events in your life, or the current absence of any happy events in your life. In such situations you need to either change reality, your perception of reality, or both.

### **Solution #1: Change Reality**

If depression is caused by unhappiness with your current situation, it can sometimes be cured by changing real, tangible things in your life like your work or hobbies.

**o Work Problems: Improve your job or change it.** If your job is making you unhappy, first try to improve your situation at work. If someone at work is making you unhappy, try using the techniques in this book to improve your working relationship with him or her. If the type of work you are doing makes you unhappy, investigate and see if there are other kinds of work you might laterally move to within your company that would make you happier.

But if neither is successful, consider leaving your job.

- 1) Try to find a better one.
- 2) If you can't find one that makes you happy, at least find one that makes you less unhappy.
- 3) If you can't find one that makes you less unhappy, at least find one that makes you unhappy with shorter hours.

**Example:** I used to be a corporate lawyer. I was miserable. I really wanted to be a screenwriter. But because I didn't wear gold chains and smoke what the people in Hollywood were smoking, I had no chance of success in this area. Instead I found a job as a journalist who wrote about legal issues. It wasn't the most exciting job I ever had, but it was head and shoulders better than being a lawyer, because at least it allowed me to write in normal English. The job was not ideal, and I wouldn't even say it was fun. But because it was an vast improvement over being a lawyer, my happiness was significantly increased (for a while).

What about the money? I am always asked about that. I took an enormous pay cut to become a journalist. But I still had enough to live on. Once you have enough to support yourself, what is the point of making a lot of money if you are very unhappy every waking moment? By valuing money so much you are also assigning a value to your time, and your happiness, and the value you are assigning to both are zero. In essence by staying at a terrible job you are asking an employer to pay you to be unhappy. That is not logical.

**o Boredom Problems: Try to find new hobbies or things you like.** As mentioned in the beginning of the book, you can increase your happiness by finding new hobbies you might like. If you're depressed because you're not having enough "fun" in life, try different things and find something that makes you at least somewhat happy, or less unhappy. That is key—you don't have to immediately find hobbies you like, you only need to find hobbies that make you less unhappy. Sometimes I can't find something I really like to do with my free time, so I do something I know I will only like a little. Do I regret this? No, because at the time my choices were doing nothing (total unhappiness) or something I liked only a little (medium unhappiness). Instead of complaining about the unsatisfactory nature of a hobby, recognize that until you find something better, your new "temporary hobby" is reducing your unhappiness and performing a necessary function.



**o Relationship problems.** If you've broken up with your boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife/Cousin It, that could be another cause for depression. An obvious solution is for you to go out and meet someone else, what in layman's terms is called a "substitute kisser". But finding a suitable replacement can take time and often simply can't be found by browsing the shelves of your local Walmart. Therefore an alternative solution is to spend more time with people, especially your friends, or people who pretend to be your friends. If you're suffering from a friend shortage, try to pursue your hobbies more vigorously—you won't be around friends, but at least you will be around other people. By being around other people, you can distract yourself from your loss.

You can also better cope with the breakup with a loved one by thinking of the most unpleasant traits of the person you have just broken up with (or someone who has had the poor judgment to break up with you). Think about all the unpleasant things about him or her and highlight them in your mind. Then say to yourself that you are well rid of those unpleasant traits and how much better your life will be without having to be exposed to them again. You should not want what you can't have.

**o Health problems.** It is very, very hard to be upbeat when you are sick. It's difficult to feel happy when you have a bad cold; it is even harder if you have a serious illness, like heart disease or cancer. Nevertheless you should try. A lot of the difficulties with a health problem is that not only is the sick person suffering from being sick, but he is also suffering from (a) worrying about what course the illness will take next and (b) wondering what he should do (or not do) to try to better cope with the sickness.

What you need to try to do is to "wall off" a few hours a day when you aren't going to think about your illness. Again, this is hard, but you need to try to discipline yourself to say, "From 3 to 6 PM I will not think about my illness. I will try to focus on a hobby or activity to take my mind off of it." After all, if you spend all your time worrying about an illness, you are not living. This will be hard to do, but you have to try.

Obviously an illness will limit your choice of activities. Talking to friends or watching television or reading a book may be all you are capable of, but you should try to do it, to distract yourself. Even if it is not great fun, if it distracts you, it is an improvement.

**Solution #2: Change your perception of reality.**

**o Tell yourself that the depressing things aren't so depressing.**

Is what's depressing you really so depressing? Does it mean an end to your life in the next few days or something almost as bad? If not, then whatever is bothering you cannot be so terrible to prevent you from living your life and enjoying it. Try to get a sense of perspective and realize there are things you can enjoy in life. If you expected a big raise, or a prize, or to win a competition, and you didn't get any of these things, you may be depressed, but there will be other challenges in your life. If you have an unpleasant work assignment to deal with, tell yourself that you are going to master it and not let it master you.

**o Whatever happens, you still have yourself.** If something depresses you, remember you will always have you, and if you like yourself, that should be enough to make you happy. Actively think about aspects of yourself you like: are you smart? A kind person? Are you funny—do you crack yourself up? What sorts of things do you handle well? To help relax yourself, you can think about situations you handled skillfully.

**o Think about the things you have to look forward to.**

Vacations, food, entertainment, hugs from your favorite animals and people—concentrate on the positive things in your life to make yourself happy.

**o Smile.** Forcing yourself to smile can make yourself happier, at least on a temporary short term basis. It sounds very stupid, but it can work.

**o Set small goals to improve your life.** Look at the earlier section where I talked about setting smaller, short term, more easily achieved goals in order to make yourself happier. The same applies to depression.

## **Chapter 9: The Steven Gordon Diet**

### **Dieting and Weight Reduction**

*“You’ll never be popular on the bus if you take up two seats.”*

--Steven Gordon

*“Have you been skipping my quotes? Pay more attention!!!!”*

--Steven Gordon

### **Being Happy on the Steven Gordon Diet**

While this isn't a diet book, it is worth mentioning that peoples' body sizes often interferes with their happiness. Since I am solving so many of your life problems I might as well help with this one as well.

The basic proposition is this: Many people feel they are fat and what's more, they think there is nothing they can do about it.

But, of course, there is. Diets generally don't work because they require people to walk around feeling hungry, which (a) isn't a natural thing to expect someone to do and (b) given easy access to food seldom works. It's not natural for people to go around feeling hungry. That's why you should consider going on the Steven Gordon diet.

**1) Drink only water.** Juices and sodas can have 100 or more calories per glass; that means 500-600 extra calories per day taken up through useless drinking.

**2) Plan three small but sensible meals per day for yourself.** Don't worry about making them big enough for you to last through the day, just make sure they are nutritious, and generally the smaller the better. You should also try to radically reduce fat from your diet.

**3) Desserts should be radically reduced.** Eat one cookie where you ate three, a half piece of cake where you ate two. Speaking realistically, this may be something you have trouble giving up. People have the hardest

time giving up desserts because they are often the tastiest part of the meal. But really, you aren't losing out on much by eating less.

**Consider the declining utility of additional bites.** Whenever you eat something, you very much enjoy the first and second bites as your mouth experiences the flavor. But by the third or fourth bites your sensitivity to the flavor is lessened, and by the ninth or tenth bite your mouth is so used to the flavor that whatever pleasure you get is minimal. People also stop paying attention to what they're eating after the first few bites, another reason why pleasure is lessened with larger desserts. Ever eat a chocolate ice cream cone and really notice the pleasure when you start to eat, but by the time you are finishing you barely notice you are eating ice cream? Now you now why.

**Consider the deadweight loss from large bites.** Since the benefits from additional bites after the first few bites are minimal, you can afford to give up large portions of desserts and stick to smaller portions. You'll get almost the same level of enjoyment from a small amount of dessert as you would a larger one. And you can stretch smaller portions simply by taking smaller bites. People often take larger bites in an effort to maximize their pleasure, but your mouth is only capable of deriving enjoyment from a relatively small amount of food. The extra food in your mouth in every bite is simply wasted calories ingested and doesn't really give you much extra pleasure. That's why if you take small bites you can get much more pleasure from the same amount of food than you can with large bites. It also helps to take a break and sip water in between bites to "reset" your taste receptors and make them appreciate the flavor once again.

By observing these principals you can eat less but still get nearly the same enjoyment from desserts.

**4) Snack with rabbit foods.** Most people fail to stay on their diets because when they eat less food they feel more hungry. Being hungry isn't a pleasant sensation and is hard to deal with especially when you have a room full of food a few feet away.

The solution is not to tell yourself not to eat. That's not very realistic and requires more mental strength than most people have. The solution is to tell yourself, once you have eaten the three small meals I recommended above, is to let yourself eat (within reason), but to eat only things that have zero fat and almost zero calories. I recommend rabbit food such as carrots and lettuce and celery. Admittedly, it is not fun to eat rabbit food (especially if you are a real man accustomed to eating meat), but it is easier to eat rabbit food if you are hungry than not to eat at all. If you eat only a reasonable amount of rabbit food when you are hungry, you will avoid hunger pains without gaining weight.

**5) Keep busy to distract yourself from your hunger.** Hunger is a feeling but it is also a thought. As with any thought, there are ways to distract yourself from it. The best way is to keep busy. When people have a lot of time on their hands, they tend to eat more. Sometimes they even eat when they aren't even hungry, simply for recreation. You should keep yourself busy not only to avoid this sort of recreation but to distract yourself from hunger. Hunger is a feeling but it is also a thought, and the human mind can only think about one thing at a time. If you can keep yourself busy with work you will feel less hungry because your mind will be occupied with work related thoughts. If you don't have a job then create projects for yourself and keep busy. The best projects are those that are conducted outside the home away from your kitchen. Reducing easy access to food also helps with dieting.

**6) Exercise.** Exercise can help you burn some calories, but not as many as you think. The main benefit of exercise, calorie-wise, is that while you are exercising you are not eating, so in that narrow sense exercise is good for you if it distracts you from eating.

**7) Chew on this book when you feel hungry.** (Not a real suggestion. I'm just checking to see if you're still paying attention!!!! Have you stopped reading and are just skimming the bold faced text? Very sad.)

No diet (including this one) can or should guarantee weight loss, but if you follow these tips there is a good chance you can lose some of your blubber.

## Chapter 10: How to Sleep Well

*"Sleeping is a form of time travel—you close your eyes, you lose awareness, and when you wake up, you're in the future."*

--Steven Gordon

Sleeping well is one of the keys to happiness. If you are tired, not only will you have difficulty doing work, but you will be unable to enjoy positive experiences fully. You will feel a certain weariness or mental fog that will prevent the pleasure centers of your brain from functioning properly. I call this mental weariness from lack of sleep the "scratchy record syndrome", like a worn down scratchy record that plays with staticy sounds, reducing the quality of the music played on it. Only in the case of the human mind it is not the sound of music but enjoyment of life that is degraded.

It is important not only to get enough sleep, but a high quality of sleep--you can sleep for eight hours but still be tired if you haven't slept soundly. Unfortunately, it is difficult to control your mind when you are asleep, but you can set up conditions to be as favorable as possible before you go to sleep.

**No tense work before bed.** Don't do work that makes you tense within an hour or two before you go to sleep. Do simple easy work or better yet do something that relaxes you, that you actually enjoy. Something that tires the mind more quickly, like reading, is better than television, but there are no firm rules on this.

**Adjust temperature.** Dress appropriately for bed making sure your body is at a comfortable temperature. Many times people can't fall asleep because they are too hot or too cold, or a specific part of them (their feet, for example) are too hot or too cold. Usually I would say to ignore slight discomforts, but in this case, it's worth it to make yourself comfortable.

**Terminate noise.** Noise is another problem if you are sensitive to it. If there is noise that annoys you consider getting something, like a fan, that will generate a constant "white noise" which can drown out



distracting irregular noises. You can also download sound effects on your computer, such as the sound of waterfalls, and play that over your speakers. Lastly, you could buy a set of ear muffs, like the ones they wear on shooting ranges, but those are bulky, forcing you to sleep on your back (but they are highly effective).

**Listen to music.** Another antidote to noise is to play music while you are trying to sleep. Music can not only drown out outside noise but can also help you fall asleep. Listen to soothing music that doesn't have a lot of variations in volume. Focus your mind on a specific instrument and follow that instrument as the music progresses.

**Avoid problem solving.** When you go to sleep do not think about problems. Say to yourself that time in bed is a problem free zone, that whatever problems you have can be thought about during daylight hours, and concentrate on happy memories. People who can't sleep often dread going to bed, but you should be happy about it, saying to yourself, "I'm going to my problem free zone now!" If you have problem sleeping your first goal should not be to sleep but merely to be relaxed in bed. If you can make yourself relaxed in bed you should tell yourself to be happy. Then sleep will eventually come naturally.

**Try different positions in bed.** If you don't find yourself falling asleep, try changing positions--from your side to your back or vice versa. Sometimes I tell myself that I am tired of my "regular bed" and that I am going to sleep in my "summer cottage". I then move my head to the edge of the bed where my feet normally lie and treat it like some exotic and new location. (The view is certainly different at the other end.)

Try to avoid naps within six hours of going to sleep.

Try not to sleep on a completely empty stomach. That can be distracting as well.

If you follow these tips you are more likely to get a good night's sleep and be happier and more productive during the day. At night problems can seem worse than they really are, but they are easier to deal with in the morning, when you are refreshed.

## Chapter 11: The Big Picture

### **The big picture: The emotional balance sheet at the end of the day**

This is going to be a reeeeeeally short chapter, but it's a really important point, so I decided to give it its own chapter, in case you've just skimming this entire book while you're half awake or watching TV or throwing socks at your cat. **Wake up for this part!**

One of the most important points of this important book is to minimize your unpleasant feelings (fear, anger, irritation, anxiety) and maximize your positive feelings (happiness). You should constantly be evaluating your success at doing this. **At the end of every day you should evaluate whether you were successful at maximizing your happiness and minimizing your unhappiness.** If you felt you could have done better, you should think of strategies to improve next time—remember, this is one day of your life that is gone, and will never return again. It's all the more important that you get higher utilization out of the next day. Think about why you were unhappy (or insufficiently happy) and think of mental strategies you could use to increase your happiness if similar events occur.

**Example 1:** Reviewing the past day, you realize you spent most of the day worrying about an evaluation you were to receive at 4 PM. The evaluation wasn't bad, but you realized you spent hours being upset about what might happen. Corrective solution: In the future, tell yourself not to worry about something like this until it actually happens, that you are torturing yourself for hours without purpose every times this happens and reducing your quality of life.

**Example 2:** You couldn't sleep well last night because you were worried about a big assignment you had to start the next day. Remember how I told you that you have to compartmentalize and “wall off” your worries from your thoughts when you go to sleep? Try to be firmer with yourself; when you go to sleep and feel thoughts of worry coming to your mind, sternly tell yourself that this is not the permitted time to think about such things, that “tomorrow's you” will handle them.

**Example 3:** You had a really great meal at a Japanese restaurant, but afterwards you realize that you have little memory of the food. You may have fallen into the trap of noticing the first bite and the second bite and then, becoming accustomed to the taste, paying no attention to the third or fourth bite. Resolve to eat more slowly and mentally focus on your most pleasurable foods when eating to increase your happiness.

Remember, your goal should be to keep track of your success in maximizing your happiness and minimizing your unhappiness and constantly readjusting your mental strategies to accomplish both these things. Note that you shouldn't be **obsessing** about doing these things, but rather thinking rationally, from time to time, how to do these things better.

### **Pay Attention!**

Now that you've gotten to the end of this book, you're probably breathing a sigh of relief. You're done!

Or are you?

### **NO, YOU'RE JUST BEGINNING!**

It's not enough to simply read my words and hope they sink into your unconscious. There is no way you are going to remember all the things I have taught you in one reading. So, to make it easier on you, below I have summarized the main points in this book. You can photocopy the following pages and put them on your refrigerator. No, on second thought, you won't read it if you put them there. How often do you stand next your refrigerator and read things on it? Better yet, make copies of these summary pages and put them wherever you linger—the dining room table, your favorite seat next to your television, your desk, under your pillow, etc. And actually look at them, from time to time.

### **How to increase your happiness**

- 1) Get better or more hobbies
- 2) Improve your job or get a better one
- 3) Experience small joys constantly in life
- 4) Be happy with your understanding and abilities
- 5) Get yourself a Pomeranian
- 6) Enjoy pleasurable experiences slowly

### **How to deal with boredom**

- 1) Make lists
- 2) Write plots to favorite movies
- 3) Do exercises
- 4) Observe people
- 5) Radical fantasizing
- 6) Notice colors and patterns
- 7) Daydream about happy events
- 8) Imagine yourself in a movie

- 9) Touch surfaces
- 10) Put your head close to surfaces and admire the view
- 11) Listen to music in your mind

### **How to be happy (or less unhappy) doing work**

- 1) Pretend work is fun computer game  
--a war game, sports game, decorating game
- 2) See chores as a game
- 3) See yourself as an action or decorating hero
- 4) Grade yourself on your efficiency and speed
- 5) See your work more humorously

### **How to reduce fear and anxiety**

- 1) Don't worry until you have to
- 2) Generally look for good solutions but don't be a perfectionist
- 3) Think about time lost in overanalyzing and worrying
- 4) For small decisions, decide something is done and leave it that way.

### **Dealing with Stress**

- 1) Are you worrying about something important?
- 2) Exercise
- 3) Block out stress from mind at set times
- 4) Think as stress as a game to win
- 5) Pretend you are a third party observer
- 6) Role play future stressful events
- 7) Don't eat dumb vegetables in the mistaken belief you will be happier

### **Small Irritations**

- 1) "Bad luck"--Treat as imaginary enemy trying to depress you, but it doesn't succeed.
- 2) Inconsiderate people--laugh as they have minds of small children
- 3) Slow salespeople--do anti-boredom techniques

### **Anger at Insults**

- 1) Realize you aren't being judged
- 2) Realize you aren't being judged fairly
- 3) Only a nutjob cares what strangers/nasty people think--if you do, there's something wrong with you
- 4) Pity insulting person like he's Gollum from Lord of the Rings
- 5) Smile at insulter
- 6) Compliment insulter
- 7) Repeat insult in silly voice
- 8) Use psychobabble
- 9) With relatives/friends, share your feelings of unhappiness
- 10) Being happy is the best revenge
- 11) Laugh when the manure word is used

### **Don't be Oversensitive**

- 1) A jelly muffin is soft, gooey, and oversensitive.
- 2) A psychopath is totally insensitive.
- 3) A bagel is just right.

### **Dealing with Low Self-Esteem**

- 1) Look at successes
- 2) Examine causes of failure, if learn, be happy
- 3) Don't label yourself a failure
- 4) Don't care what others think when it comes to self-esteem
- 5) Make more successes with smaller goals
- 6) Hug this book
- 7) Learn what you like about yourself

### **Dealing with Depression**

- 1) Improve or get a better job
- 2) Better hobbies
- 3) More contact with people
- 4) Compartmentalize health problems
- 5) See if what's depressing you is really so bad
- 6) Realize you still have you

- 7) Think of positive things to look forward to
- 8) Smile
- 9) Set small goals to improve your happiness

### **The Steven Gordon Diet**

- 1) Three sensible meals
- 2) Water, no other liquids
- 3) Eat a reasonable amount of rabbit food for snacks

### **Sleep Well**

- 1) No tense work or problem solving before bed
- 2) Good temperature and no noise,
- 3) Music if needed
- 4) Try different positions in bed
- 5) Think about happy experiences

### **The Big Picture**

- 1) Think overall whether you are doing everything you reasonably can to maximize happiness and minimize unhappiness.
- 2) If you aren't, evaluate what has happened, and see what you can do to improve in the future.
- 3) Periodically reevaluate without obsessing.

**Afterwards: Was reading this book a total waste of your time?**

There are three kinds of people on this planet:

**1) People who don't realize they have a problem.** There are many people out there who are unhappy, and don't even realize it as a problem. They are bothered by their unhappiness but don't see it as a problem that can be fixed. Many, many people are like this. Such people, unaware that this is a problem or a problem that can be fixed, are undoubtedly not even reading this book. So all we can do is pity them unless and until their level of self-awareness reaches a new self-actualized threshold.

**2) People who realize that they have a problem, but don't do very much about it.** Many people correctly identify their unhappiness as a problem but, either don't do anything to find a solution, or do search for a solution, but don't implement it. Regrettably, some of the people reading this book fall into this category. There can be a variety of reasons why people, even handed the solutions to their problems on a silver platter, do not implement them. They many feel that such solutions do not work. More likely, however, is that they do not have the mental energy to bring change about. They don't have the push to try to change themselves. Unfortunately, this is a motivational and emotional flaw, and no one can easily give this motivation to them. But it is somewhat humorous that many people, having taken the time to read this book, will think their mission is done and do no more. Simply reading this book will not improve your situation.

**3) People who realize they have a problem, and who do something about it.** This category describes not only the most intelligent people but also the most effective ones. Intelligence and effectiveness are actually very closely related. Intelligent persons do not allow problems in their lives to fester—that is not a smart thing to do. Therefore, the most



intelligent people not only identify problems and identify solutions but also implement them.

If you are one of the few, the proud, in this category, copy the summary from the last section. Refer to it often in relevant situations. Use the tips that work and discard the ones that don't. Feel free to discover and improvise improvements on the solutions I have offered here. When you find yourself internalizing solutions I have offered here, and find your happiness increasing (or your fear or anger or boredom decreasing) you will have made good use of the tips provided in this book. But reading this alone will not do that, you have to actually think about the things that are written here and make use of them.

### About the Author

Steven Gordon is many things to many people. He travels like the wind and is very likely looking over your shoulder as you are reading this. He is an inventor--of the first large scale expert question and answer site (Allexperts.com--you write a question, an expert reads it, and writes an answer, all for free!) as well as a search engine that lets one search for books and movies by plot, setting, character traits and writing style (Allreaders.com). He is a writer—20 books and counting. He is somewhat educated, having gone to Yale (Summa Cum Laude) and Harvard Law School (no Cum). He currently lives in the wilds of New Jersey with a Pomeranian named Beaver. You can contact him by using the feedback form at [www.cliffordcroft.com](http://www.cliffordcroft.com). Cliffordcroft.com also contains information about Mr. Gordon's other 19 books.

## About the Author's Pomeranian



His name is Beaver.